THE *Learning* TEAM

A handbook for parents
of children with
special needs

Alberta
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Learning and Teaching Resources Branch
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The Learning Team

A handbook for parents of children with special needs

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The primary intended audience for this document is:

Administrators	
Counsellors	
General Audience	✓
School Councils	
Parents	✓
Students	
Teachers	

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Introduction

All parents are important members of their children's learning teams. As parents, you know your child best. You know your child's strengths, abilities, developmental capacities and challenges, and as a result you can be your child's greatest supporters.

Your ongoing involvement and support in the school environment can make a positive and meaningful difference in your child's success. It is important that you participate in decisions that affect your child's education. You can contribute information that is critical to planning, putting programs into action, and adjusting the programming to best meet your child's changing needs.

As parents, you can also enrich your child's learning experiences through involvement with the community. This involvement could occur through local organizations and programs, such as parent groups or children's activities. It could also occur informally, through interactions with extended family, volunteers, friends, neighbours and the community-at-large.

Children learn in different ways and at different rates. This handbook emphasizes the diverse and changing learning needs of children with special needs. As well as offering support and encouragement to parents, the handbook describes services and activities that might be used to meet these needs at school, and suggests ways you can enhance and enrich your child's learning at home. The handbook also includes practical information and strategies for helping your child make successful transitions, for voicing your concerns and for staying informed. Each chapter ends with a Parent Notebook. These pages offer ideas for information you might want to think about, as well as sample questions you might wish to discuss with your child or your child's teachers.

For more information on standards and funding guidelines for special education see:

www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/SpecialEd_stds2003.pdf

www.learning.gov.ab.ca/funding/FundingManual

www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/default.asp

This handbook is an informal resource for parents and is not intended to be a legal document. Information is aligned with current legislation, Alberta Learning policies and the *Standards for Special Education* (2003), but for ease of reading the information is often stated in less formal language than the official sources. Key terms that are bolded the first time they appear in the text are defined in the glossary on pages 102–104. For more detailed information on topics in this handbook, refer to the Web site addresses and document titles listed in the margin.

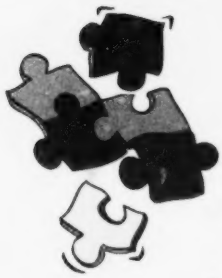
For more information see:

Shaping the Future for Students with Special Needs: A Review of Special Education in Alberta–Final Report, November 2000
www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/special/SpecialEdReview/SpEdReport.pdf

The Learning Team is a revision and expansion of the resource *Partners During Changing Times* (1996), a parent handbook developed by Alberta Learning and the College of Alberta School Superintendents. Recommendation 29, Short Term 3 of *Shaping the Future for Students with Special Needs: A Review of Special Education in Alberta–Final Report* (2000) recommended a revision of this resource that would highlight information for parents on working together with the school and other service providers.

As a part of the revision process, the Special Programs Branch conducted a series of community consultations in the fall of 2001, talking with parents across the province. Parents were asked what would help them to better support the education of their children with special needs. They indicated that they wanted opportunities to participate in all facets of their children's schooling, to be part of the decision-making process, and have access to information and ideas on a continuous, as-needed basis. Most of all, they want to be contributing members of their children's learning teams. This handbook offers information and strategies for doing just that.

Chapter 1:



Who are Children with Special Needs?

The *School Act* specifies that school boards are responsible for determining if a child is in need of a special education program.

Children with special needs, including those with mild, moderate and severe needs, and those who are gifted and talented, require specialized learning opportunities in order to receive an education that is appropriate for their learning needs. School boards must provide programming for all school-age children, including children with special needs, who live in their district.

Characteristics

When determining whether or not a child is in need of special education programming, one or more of the following characteristics are considered:

- learning—how a child processes information, acquires new information and makes links between concepts
- intellect—the ability to reason and understand information and concepts
- communication—how a child uses language to communicate and make sense of the world
- physical characteristics—gross and fine motor coordination, medical conditions, or any physical handicapping conditions, such as visual or hearing impairments
- school behaviour—how a child responds to the environment and other people, age-appropriate behaviour and independent skills, ability to adapt to new situations.

The prime consideration is how these characteristics affect an individual child's learning and functioning in the classroom. A diagnosis of an exceptionality or specific disability does not provide enough information to determine programming. For example, two children could be diagnosed with a similar condition, but each child could have very different learning needs. One child might function quite independently and need only minor accommodations to be successful, while the other child might require a very structured program.

Where to start

If your child is having difficulty learning, the first step is to talk to the classroom teacher to determine what might be causing these difficulties and decide if there are any small changes that can be made that would improve the situation.

Teachers can use a number of informal methods to identify learning needs, including:

- talking with your child
- observing your child in the classroom
- analyzing your child's class work
- doing an informal reading or math inventory
- administering screening tests.

Many districts have school-based teams that might include special education teachers, counsellors, administrators and regular classroom teachers who are knowledgeable about learning difficulties and learning strategies. Teachers may consult with the team to develop strategies to address the learning needs of individual students.

If it is apparent that school-based strategies aren't enough, the teacher, in consultation with parents, will make a referral for a **specialized assessment**. Written informed parental consent is

Informed consent means that parents:
- have all information relevant to the activity for which consent is sought
- understand and agree, in writing, to the carrying out of the activity for which their consent is sought
- understand that the granting of consent is voluntary and may be withdrawn at anytime.

For more information see:
Standards for Special Education (2003) www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/SpecialEd_stds2003.pdf

required before any specialized assessment, such as psycho-educational, speech-language, or IQ testing, begins. **Informed consent** means that parents have a clear understanding of the activity that they are granting consent for. Parents have the right to refuse consent for any proposed specialized assessment. If this happens, the school must document the reasons for the refusal and actions taken to resolve concerns. Each school authority has different assessment procedures, so talk to your child's teacher or the school principal about what will take place and how long it will take. Alberta Learning's *Standards for Special Education* recommends that specialized assessments (including the written report) be completed within eight weeks, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

When the school refers a child for specialized assessment, this does not necessarily mean a child has a special need. It may simply be an indicator that the child is having difficulties learning at a particular time and may require short-term support.

Assessment could be needed at any point in a child's schooling. For children who do have special needs, early identification and intervention is the optimal approach, but special needs may be lifelong and may change depending on the environment, the coping strategies your child develops and many other factors.

What does assessment include?

A variety of assessments may be used to determine a child's intellectual, social, emotional, physical, sensory, communication and/or behavioural development. Your child's development could be assessed in one area or in various combinations, depending on your child's needs.

An assessment has three general purposes:

- to find out if your child has a special learning need
- to identify your child's strengths and needs

- to identify appropriate programming and services that will meet your child's individual needs.

For more information see:

- *Standards for Psycho-educational Assessment* (1994)
  Order #281163
  Price $4.30
- *Promising Assessment Models and Practices* (1994)
  Order #281155
  Price $4.10

Available from the Learning Resources Centre (LRC).
Order online at:
www.lrc.learning.gov.ab.ca/

There are a number of ways parents can be involved in the assessment process. You can gather information that may be useful in the assessment process. This information could include medical reports, recent behavioural changes and observations about your child's learning needs, such as how he or she behaves and learns in other settings. A number of assessment procedures include forms for parents to complete. These forms ensure the data reflects parents' perspectives. For example, you may be asked to rank specific behaviours of your child on a scale from 1 to 10 or identify key strengths and needs.

When assessment results and additional information have been compiled, the school will contact you and arrange for a meeting to explain the results, discuss the recommendations and get your input on any related decisions.

The following chapters in this handbook offer information and strategies to consider as you participate in decisions about your child's education, and work to support your child's school success.

Parent Notebook

Areas my child is doing well in:

_____

_____

_____

Signs that indicate my child may be struggling in school and may need more support:

_____

_____

_____

Information I could share about my child's learning needs:

_____

_____

_____

Sample questions I might discuss with my child's teachers about identification and assessment:

- How is my child doing in school this year? Do you have any special concerns about his or her learning or behaviour?
- How does the school identify children who may have special learning needs?
- How can I participate in an assessment of my child's learning needs?

Chapter 2:

Building the Learning Team

As parents, you play an important role in ensuring that your child has a successful school experience. All children need the support of their parents, but students with special needs often require greater parental involvement, not only early in the school years but often right through high school, and post-secondary education and training.

Along with the classroom teacher and others who work with your child, you are an important part of your child's learning team. To be effective, it is critical that positive relationships exist among members of the team. Parents and school staff need to invest time and energy into building and maintaining these relationships.

In addition to your participation in the learning team, your child will benefit from your involvement in the school community, your support for learning at home, and the creation of a community network to support your family.

Build the home–school team

The first step in assuming your role on the learning team is to consider the opportunities you have to participate in and support your child's education.

When there are concerns about your child's learning, the teacher will typically arrange an initial meeting with you and the school learning team. The team will include the classroom teacher and might also include a school resource teacher, the principal or assistant principal, a teacher assistant, and an education psychologist or other specialist, depending on the identified needs of your child.

What is your role?

Being an informed and contributing member of your child's learning team means:

- participating in decisions that affect your child's education
- giving your written and informed consent for any specialized assessments
- being fully informed of the school's and district's programs
- providing relevant information that could affect your child's learning and behaviour at school
- receiving information on your child's learning and growth from teachers, principals and other district staff
- having access to information in your child's school files, including results of specialized assessments and reports
- being consulted before your child is placed in a special education program
- receiving reports on your child's progress at regular intervals during the school year
- providing your written authorization for any additional services your child might need
- being consulted on and giving informed written consent to your child's individualized program plan (IPP)
- questioning decisions that you do not think will best serve your child's learning needs and working with the team to find a better solution.

Know the teachers

One of the keys to building an effective home–school learning team is establishing positive working relationships with your child's teachers and other school staff. The best way to do this is to get to know staff early in the school year and ensure there is ongoing communication. Arrange a time to drop by the classroom

before or after school to introduce yourself. You can also do this by telephone or e-mail. If you want to talk with the teacher, call the school and find out the best time to do this. Welcome parent–teacher conferences as important opportunities to exchange information and work together. Children have greater respect for teachers and other staff when they observe parents endorsing and supporting their efforts.

Teachers have a number of important roles they bring to the learning team, including:

- involving parents and, when appropriate, students and other professionals in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of students' IPPs
- documenting student progress and providing feedback to parents and, when appropriate, students throughout the school year
- updating the IPP, as required
- providing teacher assistants with directions regarding roles and responsibilities for implementing programming.

Share information

Part of working as a team means keeping teachers informed about important information that could affect your child's learning. Sharing relevant information can have a positive effect on your child's learning experience, because it allows teachers to tailor learning opportunities and deal knowledgeably with sensitive issues.

This information might include:

- relevant medical information
- successful learning and behaviour techniques that you are using at home

- changes in the home setting—such as a death, divorce, unemployment or loss of a pet—that might cause emotional reactions
- your child's past school experiences
- ongoing goals for your child that you are supporting at home.

Know your school principal

For more information see:
Standards for Special Education (2003)
www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/SpecialEd_stds2003.pdf

Under the *Standards for Special Education*, the principal is responsible for special education programming in the school. Get to know your school principal. He or she can be a source of information and is an important member of your child's learning team.

The role of the school principal includes:

- ensuring that an IPP is developed, implemented, monitored and evaluated for each student identified as having a special need
- identifying teachers whose responsibility it is to coordinate, develop, implement, monitor and evaluate student IPPs
- ensuring the school has a process and **school-based team** to provide **consultation**, planning and problem solving related to programming for students with special needs.

Expand the team

Some children with special needs require an expanded learning team in order to be successful. In these cases, teachers and parents will work collaboratively with other people, such as teacher assistants, counsellors, volunteers or community service-providers.

Teacher assistants

Teacher assistants provide supportive and complementary services in the classroom in order to enhance the learning experiences of children, especially those with special needs.

Generally, teacher assistants are assigned to a program or classroom rather than to an individual child. Assignments may change depending on children's needs, the resources available and other needs in the school or classroom.

Teacher assistants receive all directions and assigned responsibilities from the teacher or principal. Teachers are ultimately responsible for planning, implementing and assessing your child's programs.

Some roles and responsibilities delegated to teacher assistants could include:

- providing individual support under the direction of the teacher and based on the objectives and goals outlined in the student's IPP
- working with a small group of students to reinforce a concept or skill that the teacher has previously taught to the group
- providing personal care, such as toileting, personal hygiene, dressing, or checking the operation of assistive equipment
- assisting with material preparation
- providing information to the teacher about a student's academic performance, behaviour, growth and needs
- supervising students beyond the classroom, such as on the playground or at work experience sites
- providing behaviour support by reinforcing appropriate behaviour consistent with the teacher's expectations.

Mentors

Some students with special needs may benefit from the individual attention of a mentor. A mentor is an adult or older student who commits to working regularly with a child for a certain period of time, usually one to three hours per week. Mentors who work with a child during school hours look for ways to support that child's classroom learning. Mentors work under the direction of the teacher. They take a personal interest in the child's academic and social development, introduce the child to new experiences and act as role models. Mentors are usually volunteers and are often recruited, trained and supported through community agencies, such as Big Brothers or Big Sisters. Mentors can be informal members of the learning team.

Community services

Children with special needs and their families may access a variety of services in the community. Depending on the needs of the child, these could include psychologists, medical doctors, psychiatrists, social workers, behavioural specialists and other professionals. These members of the learning team can help meet a variety of health and social-emotional needs.

Health-related services

School jurisdictions make provisions for students to have access to the coordinated support services (including health-related services) they require to meet individualized programming goals. Each school jurisdiction, in partnership with other regional service providers, has its own local procedures for the delivery of these services. Contact your school principal for more information about what additional services might be available to meet your child's assessed needs.

Be part of the school community

There are many ways you can participate in your child's school community, ranging from providing input to serving on school councils to volunteering in the school. You need to decide on the degree and nature of involvement after considering your skills, interests, family needs, work commitments and other obligations.

Provide input

It is important to provide your input at available opportunities. Teachers seek parental opinions, comments, feedback and suggestions in many ways.

Some ways you can provide input include:

- writing comments and completing feedback sheets attached to school newsletters
- completing interest and academic inventories about your child
- commenting on projects and accomplishments.

Participating in parent–teacher conferences and attending school council meetings are also opportunities to provide input to the school community.

School councils and committees

Participating in school councils or serving on school committees can be opportunities to gain knowledge about educational issues, build relationships with other parents and school staff, and work together to ensure that all children in the school are getting a quality education. School councils provide advice to the principal on school-related issues, such as policies, program priorities, budget, special needs, school climate and events planning.

For more information see:

School Councils Handbook: Meaningful Involvement for the School Community (Revised March 1999) www.learning.gov.ab.ca/parents/school_cou_handbook.pdf

School Council Resource Manual (1995) www.learning.gov.ab.ca/parents/scm.pdf

Volunteer

For some parents, volunteering in their children's school can be a hands-on way to show their children that they value education and support the work of teachers and other staff. This, in turn, can increase all children's learning opportunities. Parent volunteers can also be powerful supporters of the school and public education, and provide valuable links to the wider community.

Volunteers can offer to:

- share expertise on a particular career, theme, skill, interest or custom
- work one-on-one with a child who is experiencing academic difficulties in a specific area, such as reading
- serve as a mentor to an individual child
- complete administrative tasks at home, such as preparing materials or phoning other parents about field trips and special events
- assist in the school library
- assist in the classroom under the direction of the teacher.

Advocate for your child

An advocate is a person who speaks up for, acts on behalf of, or supports someone else. You are the person who best knows your child's strengths, personality, challenges and successes. You will be the constant throughout your child's schooling. Advocacy is a natural part of being a parent. The best advocates are skilled at maintaining positive working relationships while creating win-win solutions. They have a clear and realistic vision of what they want for their children, and they are able to communicate this vision to others.

The advocacy skills that you model become a strong foundation on which your child can build his or her own self-advocacy skills. Many times, as children progress through junior and senior high school and into the community, they can assume more of this responsibility. There is more information on teaching your child self-advocacy skills on pages 55–56 of this handbook.

Adults with disabilities who achieve success in school and in their everyday lives often credit their accomplishments to their parents' ongoing involvement in their education.

Tips for being an effective parent advocate

- The best advocates work with others. By working in collaboration with teachers and other parents, seeking family support and accessing assistance through community agencies, you can create win-win solutions that work for everyone.
- Think of advocating as a "work in progress." Each experience improves your communication and collaboration skills.
- Expect that involvement will be continuous and ongoing as the needs of your child change over the years.
- Think about what your short-term and long-term vision is for your child. Clarify that vision so you can communicate it clearly and convincingly to others.
- Expect courtesy and respect from school staff. Meaningful parent involvement is a core value of the education system in this province.
- Be respectful of those who are working on behalf of your child.
- Recognize your limitations and be willing to seek support as required. There are others who can help if you ask.
- Keep your sense of humour.

- Be patient. Sometimes finding the information or assistance you require is a time-consuming process of trial and error.
- Listen to and consider the perspectives of others. It's an important way to build understanding and relationships.
- Celebrate your child's successes.
- Recognize and cherish your accomplishments and the positive impact they have on your child's learning, and emotional and social life.

Communication is key

Clear and regular communication is key to the success of the learning team. The old adage "it's not what you say but how you say it" is so true when working with others. It is important to ensure messages are clear and information is shared effectively among all learning team members.

You may hear terms you are not familiar with, such as IPPs (individualized program plans) or outcomes. If at any time you are unsure about specific information, ask. To communicate effectively, everyone on the team must speak and understand the same language.

Invest your time

Understand that communication and collaboration take time. You may be invited to participate in a variety of meetings over the course of the school year. These may include in-school team meetings as well as consultations with other support personnel, in addition to regular parent–teacher conferences.

Give change a chance

Change takes time. Your child may require a period of adjustment to a new setting before positive change is evident. Clear, open communication among learning team members will go a long way to ensuring expectations are reasonable.

Consider what support you need

Often, parents choose to bring a support person to learning team meetings. This could be a family member, friend, or another teacher or community worker who is familiar with the child.

The support person may attend simply to take notes for the family. In other cases, this person may be someone with an understanding of other learning options, who can ask relevant questions.

If you feel that such a support person would be of benefit, arrange this ahead of time. Let the school know of your plans so they can be ready with sufficient seating, offer extra copies of any paperwork, and clarify the role of the support person in the meeting.

Keep records

One task parents often take on is the gathering and organizing of relevant documents, reports, lists and other information about their children's education. From meetings and conversations with teachers and members of the team, and from your own research, you may collect a significant amount of information. Organizing these records can take some time initially, but in the long run it may be time well spent.

To effectively support your child, you might wish to keep the following kinds of records organized and accessible:

- birth records, including a copy of the birth certificate and any pertinent information regarding the pregnancy and birth
- dates and ages of developmental milestones, such as first words and first steps
- record of immunizations, Alberta Health Care number and any additional health-care coverage

- record of medical interventions, including assessment, treatments and surgeries
- medication history, including details about medications, side effects, dosages and purposes
- list of pediatricians and doctors involved in diagnosing or caring for your child, including names, specialties, phone numbers and addresses
- list of other specialists, such as speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists or educational psychologists
- progress reports or report cards
- individualized program plans
- record of educational assessments, standardized tests and accommodations
- school phone numbers, and names and titles of contact people
- school transportation details, including contact names, bus numbers and routes
- dated school correspondence
- notes from meetings
- list of community support people, including names, agencies and contact numbers
- research information related to your child's special needs, or potential interventions or strategies.

Parents have the right to review their children's school records or cumulative files. Call ahead and arrange a convenient time. The principal will need to arrange for a staff member to be available to answer questions or help interpret reports or other information that might be in the file. If there are documents in the school file that you would like to copy for your own file, make a written request to the principal.

Once you get your basic file together, keeping it up-to-date is easy. As you receive other documents, highlight or flag them and file them immediately.

Tips for organizing information

- Decide how to store the information. Use a large three-ring binder, an expandable file or whatever storage system works for you.
- Keep information in chronological order, with current documents on top or at the front of the file, as these are likely the ones needed most often.
- Highlight dates to help with filing and retrieving forms.
- Use self-stick removable notes to flag important documents you need to review on a regular basis or those that require follow-up.
- Keep a list of key contact names and numbers at the front of your file.

"A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in or the kind of car I drove. But the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child."
Author Unknown

Support learning at home

There are many ways to support your child's learning at home, including talking about what is going on at school, helping your child practise new skills, finding out about the curriculum and recognizing your child's learning accomplishments.

Talk about learning

Talking about learning lets your child know that you value hearing about his or her learning experiences, joys and challenges. Ask your child about friendships, recess activities, progress on assignments, new experiences, activities in a special program, highlights of the day, homework and concerns or difficulties. Ask about tomorrow and upcoming events too.

Talking to your child about learning experiences provides an opportunity to acknowledge efforts, strengths and successes. It also allows you to identify ongoing needs and begin developing strategies to help your child in these areas. The strategies you use will depend on the capabilities and needs of your child.

Some families may benefit from a home–school communication book that goes back and forth daily. Parents and teaching staff can decide what format would work best, and then use the book each day to record activities the child does, reminders or questions and good news. This strategy works particularly well for children with limited language because it ensures that both parents and teaching staff know what is happening in the child's day. This information can then be used to talk with the child, reinforce learning and address other concerns. The effectiveness of a communication book depends on both teachers and parents participating consistently.

Help practise new skills

For more information see:

The Parent Advantage: Helping Children Become More Successful Learners at Home and School, Grades 1–9 (1998)
Available from the Learning Resources Centre (LRC)
Order #361501
Price $6.80
Order online at: www.lrc.learning.gov.ab.ca/

Tips for Parents
www.learning.gov.ab.ca/parents/tips.asp

You may be able to act as an audience for your child to practise speaking skills, reading, giving a report or reviewing word lists. You might help reinforce basic skills, such as math facts, spelling words, new sight or vocabulary words, by practising with simple games or flashcards.

Being informed about upcoming projects and presentations gives you an opportunity to help your child with these specific activities as well. In addition to talking to your child about assignments, you can get information from the teacher or teacher assistant—many schools use agenda books to log assignments, tests and upcoming school events.

Find out what your child is learning

For more information see:

Curriculum Handbooks for Parents (updated annually)
www.learning.gov.ab.ca/parents/handbooks/

Find out what skills and concepts your child will be exploring throughout the school year. There are curriculum handbooks available for each grade level. These handbooks outline topics and skills for each subject area, and are updated annually. They can be downloaded at no charge from the Alberta Learning Web site and are also available for purchase from the Learning Resources Centre (LRC). Ask your child's teacher or school principal if these resources are available at the school.

For children in adapted and modified programs, refer to the IPP for specific concepts and skills they will be working on, and discuss the sequence of topics with the classroom teacher.

Knowing what your child will be learning lets you look for teachable moments at home to reinforce and build on new skills and information. For example, if your child is learning a specific concept in science such as senses, families can look for opportunities to use the different senses and talk about how senses provide information.

Recognize accomplishments

Show your child that the products of his or her learning are important to you. Display pieces on the fridge. Design a scrapbook with favourite selections from each school year, in order to show growth over time. Have a special piece framed so that it is preserved forever. Tie a bow around a piece of art or written project and send it to a grandparent or other family member as a gift.

Build a community network

Look for support not only within your school system but throughout the community-at-large. There is a range of knowledge, advice and help available from other people, agencies and support services in your community. These connections can dispel feelings of isolation and confusion and give you an opportunity to share your knowledge and wisdom with others.

Community agencies and groups

Community agencies can provide a range of support and information. There are many nonprofit organizations whose prime mandate is to support families of children with special needs. Many of these organizations offer programs for parents and children, resources from lending libraries, regular meetings,

informational sessions, and liaison and consultation services. *See Appendix D, page 96 for a list of provincial parent groups.*

Learning opportunities

Various organizations and universities offer conferences, symposiums and presentations focusing on children with special needs. These kinds of events can be valuable opportunities to learn about best practices and research. Consult community agencies and their newsletters, local newspapers or special interest publications for more information. School councils may host information sessions or special speakers for parents. Talk to your school council about sessions that might benefit parents in your school.

You can also find helpful organizations by looking through the phone book or on the Internet.

Other parents

Other parents of children with special needs can be great sources of support. They can offer empathy and encouragement, information about resources, support groups and community services, and strategies for coping with day-to-day challenges. *See Appendix D, page 96 for a list of provincial parent groups.*

Parent Notebook

Members of my child's learning team:

_____

_____

_____

Information about my child that I need to share with the school early in the year:

_____

_____

_____

Ways I can be involved in my child's education at school:

_____

_____

_____

Documents and information I might need to organize:

_____

_____

_____

Ways I can support my child's learning at home:

_____

_____

_____

Parent Notebook

Groups and people that could be part of my child's community network:

_____

_____

_____

Sample questions I might discuss with my child's teachers about the learning team:

- How can we stay in touch so that I can support the work you are doing in the classroom? What's the best way to reach you?
- Are there guidance counsellors or learning consultants who could provide additional information and consultation on program planning for my child if we need it?
- What are some ways I can help my child at home? How can I reinforce strategies my child is learning and using in class?

Sample questions I might discuss with my child about the learning team:

- Who helps you at school? What kinds of things do they do and say that help you learn?
- When I visit your classroom, what kinds of things do you want me to notice?
- What kinds of things can we do at home to support your learning?

Chapter 3:

Meeting Children's Diverse Learning Needs

All children can learn, but not all children learn in the same way, at the same time or at the same rate—learning is an individual process. Meeting children's diverse learning needs means identifying needs, developing individual goals and objectives for a child, selecting or designing appropriate supports and services, and then choosing the best learning setting.

Effective programming

Effective programming can be delivered in many settings. Appropriate placements or learning settings for students with special needs should be chosen on an individual basis. One size does not fit all.

Instruction and programming are key to a successful education. There are a number of guiding principles for effective programming, including the following.

- Programming must be based on an individual student's needs, but it may be provided within the context of a learner group composed of a number of individual students, each with unique needs.
- Programming is an active process, which is continuously monitored and adjusted to meet a student's needs.

- Many practices used to support students with special needs will benefit all students.
- Programming requires consistent use of strategies across settings and grades.
- Programming requires teamwork and collaboration among students, parents and school staff.
- Programming requires ongoing communication.
- Programming requires an organizational structure and school culture that support collaboration, parent involvement, individualized program planning and accommodation.
- Programming for students with special needs builds on the provincial curriculum—the knowledge, skills and attitudes that a student is expected to learn in a subject area. However, the content may need to be modified or the learning activities and instruction adjusted to meet an individual student's ability level.

An **adapted program** retains the outcomes of the prescribed curriculum and adjusts the instruction to address the special learning needs of the student. A **modified program** has learning outcomes that are significantly different from the provincial program and specifically selected to meet a student's special learning needs.

Individualized Program Planning

"The IPP is a 'game' plan devised by the 'team' in a huddle. It decides what to do to win."
– Dr. Dave Carter

Each student identified as having special needs must have an individualized program plan (IPP). An IPP is a written commitment of intent by the learning team to ensure appropriate planning for students with special needs. It is a working document and a record of student progress.

An IPP is:

- a collaborative team effort involving the student, parents, teachers and resource personnel. The individuals involved may change over time, depending on the needs of the student
- developed to address the specific educational needs of individual learners
- a planning document that helps monitor and evaluate a student's education program and progress
- a summary of accommodations and modifications that will help the student learn more effectively
- a guide for transition planning.

Developing an IPP involves six interrelated stages including the following.

1. Identifying needs
2. Setting the direction
3. Creating a plan
4. Implementing the plan
5. Reviewing and revising
6. Transition planning

These steps may occur in different sequences or be worked on simultaneously depending on the individual needs of students. As parents and members of the learning team, you can be actively involved in all stages of the IPP process.

Step 1: Identifying needs

You are a source of valuable information in the initial stages of developing and setting the direction of the IPP.

You can provide information about your child in areas such as the following:

- personality traits
- strengths and needs

- family and educational history that impacts the child's present learning situation
- interests, talents and desires
- relevant medical history and health-care needs
- aspirations and goals for your child
- assistance that your family can provide at home to practise, reinforce and maintain skills
- information about community services, after-school situations or caregivers which could impact your child's learning.

For more information see:
Standards for Special Education (2003)
www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/SpecialEd_stds2003.pdf

Alberta Learning requires that the following essential information be included in the IPP:

- assessment data
- current level of performance and achievement
- identification of strengths and areas of need
- measurable goals and objectives
- procedures for evaluating student progress
- identification of coordinated support services required, including health-related services
- relevant medical information
- required classroom accommodations, such as changes to instructional strategies, assessment procedures, materials, resources, facilities or equipment
- transition plans
- formal review of progress at regularly scheduled reporting periods
- year-end summary.

Step 2: Setting the direction

Establishing priorities helps the learning team focus on what is critical for your child to learn this school year. The team establishes these priorities based on all the information that has been gathered to date and the availability of resources.

To determine the most important learning needs, the team considers:

- priority areas to focus on
- possibilities for using this new skill or knowledge in other areas and settings
- related areas of strength
- how this need affects overall learning and achievement
- transferability to other subject areas
- contribution to independence
- age appropriateness
- how long it will take to master this new skill
- how the skills and knowledge relate to your child's future goals.

Step 3: Creating a plan

As part of the IPP team, you can offer ideas and information in the creation of long-term goals for your child. These goals are usually what the child might accomplish in a specific area in a determined period of time, usually one school year. It is important that the team identify what is manageable for the child. This is where a parent perspective can be especially helpful.

Long-term goals are broad statements about achievement, such as:

- by the end of the year, Jace will improve his reading comprehension skills to a Grade 3 level
- by the end of the year, Lee will play and work cooperatively with peers.

Short-term objectives are small measurable steps that will lead from the child's present performance to the long-term goal. For example, short-term objectives for the same long-term goals above could include:

- by January 31, Jace will independently read one self-selected book and be able to retell the general storyline to another person

- by February 15, Lee will participate successfully in small group math activities and complete all related group tasks.

When you understand what the long-term goals and short-term objectives of your child's program plan are, you can decide how to best support your child at home.

Step 4: Implementing the plan

In this phase of the process, the learning team reviews the content of the IPP and how progress will be measured. Teachers then put the instructional and assessment strategies into practice, and adjust short-term objectives as needed. Look for ways your family can support the IPP goals at home.

Step 5: Reviewing and revising

Review meetings are opportunities to discuss your child's program and consider possible revisions. The year-end review is especially important as the team reviews the education plan and adds written recommendations to the IPP. This is particularly true for children moving from one school to another or making any kind of transition.

You can also contact the school to request a review of the IPP at any time if you have concerns about your child's progress or if your child is experiencing significant changes in achievement, attitude, behaviour or health. The IPP can be adjusted or changed at any time throughout the school year, as the team deems necessary.

Tips for effective IPP meetings

Before the meeting

- Discuss the positive elements in the individualized program plan with your child.
- Find out about your child's involvement and role in the meeting. Decide if your child will benefit from participating in the meeting or, at least part of the meeting.
- Review the comments from your child's last report card, and goals and objectives from the last IPP. What progress have you seen? Note any areas of concern.
- Ask your child questions.
  - What do you like best about school?
  - What are some changes that would help you learn better at school?
  - What goals do you have for yourself?

  (If your child attends the meeting, he or she may be able to give this input directly.)
- Be prepared. Write a list of questions and concerns that you want to discuss. Prioritize your concerns.
- If you feel you need additional support, consider arranging to have your spouse or another person accompany you. This individual can lend moral support, offer a different perspective on an issue, hear important points you may miss or take notes for you.

At the meeting

- Ask questions to ensure that you have a clear and accurate understanding of your child's progress and program.
- Ask if there are any new assessments, reports or observations.
- Ask about your child's strengths, interests, areas of growth, areas of need and friendships.

- Share your present and future goals for your child.
- Discuss any specific concerns you have about your child.
- Share any home conditions that may impact your child's performance or behaviour at school and any recent documents or medical updates.
- Share samples of your child's work completed at home, if you think this can contribute to a better understanding of your child. Teachers usually have samples of student work to share, but if not, ask to see samples.

At the close of the meeting

- Establish mutually agreed upon goals and strategies for your child.
- Find out how you can support your child at home.
- Take notes on recommendations and timelines, such as additional services or assessments.
- Verbally summarize your understanding and interpretation of the decisions made, actions to be taken, timelines, and roles and responsibilities of each participant.
- Give feedback to the people working with your child in areas where you noted positive effort, growth or change. People who feel valued and recognized are encouraged to continue their efforts.
- Sign the IPP to indicate your agreement with the plan. If you do not agree with the IPP and do not wish to sign, the school has an obligation to document the reasons for your decision and what actions are taken to resolve the issue. *For additional information on resolving differences, see Chapter 6.*
- Ask for a copy of the IPP to refer to at home.
- Decide on the next meeting date.

Informed consent means that parents:

- have all information relevant to the activity for which consent is sought
- understand and agree, in writing, to the carrying out of the activity for which their consent is sought
- understand that the granting of consent is voluntary and may be withdrawn at anytime.

After the meeting

- Give your child feedback from the meeting.
- Discuss what needs to happen in order to reach the IPP goals. Discuss what your child's role is and also how the teachers and your family will support the plan.

To review the effectiveness of your child's IPP, consider the following questions.

- How does the IPP build on my child's strengths?
- Does the IPP focus on the individual needs of my child?
- Does the IPP focus on key goals for my child?
- Are accommodations tailored to the strengths, needs and learning style of my child?
- Is there an appropriate balance for my child? (Each student should participate in the regular curriculum as much as possible with accommodations to support success.)
- Does the IPP use more than one source of assessment data to determine strengths and needs?
- Does my child have social and behaviour needs that should be addressed in the IPP?
- Does the IPP outline transition plans?
- If there are several teachers responsible for my child's education program, are there procedures for all of them to have access to the IPP so they can use it to plan instruction, monitor progress, and contribute to evaluating and changing goals and objectives?
- Does the IPP use a number of strategies to measure and communicate your child's progress?
- Is progress on IPP goals monitored frequently? If objectives are met, are new ones set? If my child is not demonstrating progress, does the team review the program and make changes?

For more information see:
Policy 1.6.2—Special Education
www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/polplan/polregs/162.asp

Step 6: Transition planning

Transition planning involves identifying the kinds of skills that need to be in place for students to be successful in future placements and settings, and developing a plan of action to ensure students acquire these skills and attitudes. It may also include specific plans for moving between education placements and programs.

Accommodations

Most students with special needs require accommodations to improve their opportunities to learn. An accommodation is a change to the regular way a student is expected to learn, complete assignments or participate in the classroom. There are three general types of accommodations:

- classroom and physical accommodations, e.g., alternative seating, adaptive devices
- instructional accommodations, e.g., providing copies of notes, alternative reading materials
- evaluation and testing accommodations, e.g., extra time, oral tests.

To be effective, accommodations must match the specific learning needs of the individual students.

Classroom accommodations

The classroom environment should be nurturing, supportive and successful for all students. To help make this true for students with special needs, teachers may need to make various adaptations to the classroom environment.

Teaching staff can adapt resources and materials to help students learn more successfully. Sample adaptations could include:

- enlarging reading materials

- arranging for a scribe to write down what the student with special needs dictates
- using manipulatives, such as objects for counting
- providing pencil and pen grips
- using highlighters to underline key information
- providing desktop number lines and alphabet charts
- accessing computers for word processing, spell checkers, graphics, organizers
- providing different types of paper, such as paper with grids, dotted middle lines or raised lines.

Accommodations can also be made at the classroom level. Sample environmental adaptations could include:

- using carrels or tables for students who need a quiet spot free from distractions
- allowing a student to stand rather than sit for selected activities
- rearranging the seating plan on a regular basis until the best location for a student is identified.

Instructional accommodations

Instructional accommodations are built on an understanding of how an individual student learns best. Appropriate instructional accommodations ensure that each student has the opportunities and support he or she needs to learn. Talk with your child's teachers about the accommodations they think will benefit your child.

Sample instructional accommodations could include:

- breaking instruction into steps
- using peer partners and tutors
- using an approach that taps all the senses. For example, a lesson on recycling might include a video about recycling, a display of recycled products and a hands-on reading activity

- demonstrating or modelling a sample of the required task or activity
- posing questions that require different levels of thinking
- using role-playing to practise new skills
- brainstorming opportunities that allow students to learn from and build on the ideas of others.

Assistive technologies

Assistive technology, as used in special education, is technology that is required for students with disabilities to access or profit from learning and is not required for students who do not have disabilities. Assistive technology (sometimes called adaptive technology) helps reduce the barriers to learning caused by physical, sensory, cognitive, speech or learning disabilities by allowing students to perform tasks that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to do independently. Computers are the most well-known form of assistive technology but there are a variety of products available to help students with learning difficulties.

The learning team may consider exploring some form of assistive technology with your child. However, not every student with special needs benefits from assistive technology. The decision to try assistive technology should be made on an individual basis, after considering your child's strengths, needs and motivations, and researching the effectiveness and cost of a particular assistive technology.

In many school settings, assistive technologies can benefit a wide range of children. For example, taped books could be used at a listening centre for a group of students with varying degrees of need as well as for those with no identified special needs. This helps create an equal opportunity to participate, as well as a sense of community and equality.

Computers as learning tools

Computers can be motivating tools to engage students in reading and writing. Writing can be both physically and psychologically demanding, but computers may offer an efficient mode for writing for some students. Computer word-processing software can help students revise their writing with spell checkers and word banks. CD-ROM electronic books can strengthen students' reading skills with interactive features, such as read-aloud text, animation, captivating illustrations, highlighted words and questions with answers.

There are many adaptations, such as touch screens, custom screen covers and voice activators, that give students with special needs the potential to participate fully in computer activities and instructional sessions. Some students may benefit from special software to help them learn or review new skills.

The field of assistive technology is rapidly growing and what is not available or appropriate for your child one year might be more affordable and have new features the next.

Tips for selecting software for your child to use at home

Be discriminating and ask the following types of questions.

- Is the software suited to the needs of my child?
- What skills and concepts does it teach or reinforce?
- Is the response time appropriate for my child?
- Does it allow my child to make individual decisions with minimal help from adults?
- Does it meet the interests of my child?
- Is it motivating to my child?

- Is it flexible enough to let users select or modify the level of material presented so that it can continue to be used as my child's skills develop?
- Is it developmentally, academically and socially appropriate?

Classroom assessment accommodations

Some students require special accommodations for classroom assessment so teachers and parents can gather the information needed to create a clear and realistic picture of student growth and achievement. Students often know what they need in order to demonstrate their knowledge in the classroom and in testing situations. It is important to discuss your child's suggestions with the teacher or, if appropriate, have your child initiate the discussion and propose appropriate accommodations.

These accommodations might include:

- extended time
- breaks during the test
- fewer questions
- breaking a test into parts and administering them at separate times
- use of a scribe to write the answers
- opportunity to tape answers
- more detailed instructions
- use of a reader.

Accommodations for writing provincial achievement tests

Schools may request provisions for students with special needs who are writing the provincial achievement tests (PATs) in Grades 3, 6 and 9 or the Grade 12 diploma exams. In order to demonstrate their learning, some children need test procedures adjusted to accommodate their special needs. Eligible students

may be allowed extra time, may receive an adapted test (e.g., braille, enlarged print, taped) and/or may use alternate ways of recording their responses to test questions, such as the use of a scribe. These special provisions must be the same provisions that are used in testing throughout the school year and must be part of a student's IPP.

For more information see:
Provincial Testing
www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/provtest.asp

For further information about special provisions, talk with your child's teacher or principal, or visit Alberta Learning's Web site.

Parent Guide to Provincial Achievement Testing is a handbook designed especially for parents and should be available from your school at no cost. You can also telephone Alberta Learning's Learner Assessment Branch at 780–427–0010, for a copy.

Effective use of accommodations

As members of the learning team, parents can have a role in consulting with teachers to select and evaluate the use of accommodations such as extra time to complete tests or audiotape versions of textbooks. Understanding some of the common barriers to the effective use of accommodations can help the team make thoughtful and informed decisions about appropriate accommodations for individual children.

Barriers to effective use

Some parents, students and teachers perceive that accommodations give students with special needs an unfair advantage over other students. In other words, by changing the way a student can take a test or submit an assignment, accommodations are sometimes seen as giving students with special needs opportunities that other students do not have. In reality, accommodations remove, or at least lessen, the impact of a student's disability and therefore give the student equal opportunity to succeed.

A second misunderstanding is the perception that accommodations replace the need to acquire or develop basic skills. Effective accommodations reduce the impact of many students' learning difficulties and make it easier for them to acquire and produce information. However, it is important to balance the use of accommodations with the teaching and practice of basic skills to ensure students continue to master new skills and become more independent learners.

Tips for ensuring your child has appropriate accommodations

- Discuss the benefits and limitations of using accommodations with your child and your child's teachers and other professionals.
- Ensure your child's strengths are considered when choosing appropriate accommodations.
- If possible, involve your child in the selection and evaluation of accommodations. Often children will know what works best for them.
- Ensure that any classroom accommodations are documented on your child's IPP.
- Be open to considering accommodations that are usually associated with disabilities different from your child's. For instance, students with learning disabilities may benefit from recorded audio texts more typically used by students with visual disabilities.
- Encourage the team to prioritize the introduction of accommodations if more than one accommodation is used. Your child might need to become familiar with one accommodation before another one is introduced.
- Consult with your child about the use of accommodations after he or she tries them. Compare performance before and after.
- Where appropriate, reinforce use of accommodations at home.

Medical services at school

Rapid advances in medical science and technologies have allowed some children with health-related needs to lead more independent lives and attend school. As a result, the necessity and practice of providing health-related services in the classroom is increasing.

If your child needs a medical service at school, the local health authority may be required to provide the service during the day. This necessitates a coordinated team approach involving parents, school staff and the local health authority collaborating to meet the medical needs of the child.

If school staff assist in the provision of health-related support services, parents and health professionals must provide written authorization for staff to provide the needed service. School authorities must also ensure that staff, which in some special cases is the entire school staff, receive appropriate training in administering the required services.

Administering medications

If the service is the ongoing administration of medications, the medication must be provided in the original container with the prescription attached. The involved health care professionals and parents must also provide school staff with the following information:

- written permission to administer the medication
- dosage and intended purpose of the medication, e.g., seizure control
- list of possible side effects
- information on storage
- clear, concise directions for administering each required medication.

Information about medication and procedures for providing each health-related service may be included in the child's IPP.

Each school district has policies and written procedures regarding the provision of health-related services for students with special needs. These policies and procedures must be adhered to explicitly.

Prevention and wellness programs

Districts may access the services of local health authorities to deliver prevention and wellness programs for students, parents and staff. Your local health authority can provide more information about this outreach.

Placement

Many children with special needs are placed in regular classrooms in their neighbourhood or local schools, and are provided with programming, supports and services to meet their individual needs throughout the school day. There are a range of placement options possible; different children need different kinds of support. Decisions related to the placement of students are best made on an individual basis.

Deciding on the educational placement for an individual child is a collaborative process. If there is a disagreement, parents can appeal a decision. *See Chapter 6 for more information on resolving differences.*

For more information see:

Policy 1.6.1—Educational Placement of Students with Special Needs
www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/polplan/polregs/161.asp

Regular classroom settings

In Alberta, educating students with special needs in inclusive settings is the first placement option to be considered by school boards in consultation with parents and, when appropriate, students. **Inclusion**, by definition, refers not merely to setting but

to specially designed instruction and support for students with special needs in regular classrooms and neighbourhood schools.

There are many terms used to describe accommodating students with special needs in regular classrooms, including mainstreaming, integration and inclusion. To be effective, inclusion requires preparation on the part of parents and teachers, appropriate instructional accommodations, and thoughtful planning. Students without special needs can also benefit by gaining increased understanding, acceptance and respect for others.

Resource programs

Small group instruction is sometimes offered in local or neighbourhood schools to accommodate students with special needs. Resource teachers may offer small group instruction in such areas as reading or math. This intensive instruction may take place within or outside the regular classroom. Learning activities focus on specific skills and are developed in collaboration with other teachers. Small group instruction may also be an option for providing greater challenge and expansion of content for students who are gifted or talented.

Specialized classes

For more information on educational options for students who are gifted and talented, see the Alberta Learning resource *The Journey: A Handbook for Parents of Children Who are Gifted and Talented*, available Fall 2003. This was a collaborative project with the Alberta Associations for Bright Children (AABC).

All decisions about placement must be made in the best interests of each individual student so he or she can experience both challenge and success. For some students with special needs, complete inclusion may not be the best option. Some students with special needs or exceptional abilities, may benefit from specialized programs. In some cases, these students are placed in specialized classes either within a neighbourhood school or at a district site. They may attend specialized classes full-time or may be partially integrated into regular classrooms for some subject areas or activities.

Parent Notebook

Information I want to share about my child during IPP development:

Accommodations that work well with my child at home:

Assistive technology I'd like to find out more about:

Parent Notebook

Sample questions I might discuss with my child's teachers:

- How will you be assessing my child's progress and understanding of concepts in your class?
- What is your understanding of my child's learning strengths and needs? How will this affect his or her learning and participation in your class?
- What kinds of accommodations will be available in your classroom?

Sample questions I might discuss with my child before IPP conferences:

- What do you feel are your successes at school? What is really working for you?
- Are there any problems that we need to find some solutions to? What can be done to make things better?
- What are your goals for this school year?

Chapter 4:

Supporting Social and Emotional Growth

Promote understanding of your child's special needs

For more information on supporting children who are gifted and talented, see the Alberta Learning resource *The Journey: A Handbook for Parents of Children Who are Gifted and Talented*, available Fall 2003. This was a collaborative project with the Alberta Associations for Bright Children (AABC).

One of the greatest gifts you can give your child is an understanding and appreciation of his or her strengths and needs. Having a strong sense of identity and self-awareness gives children inner strength and confidence.

Depending on your child's capacity for understanding, look for ways to help your child understand and work with his or her own unique strengths and learning needs.

Tips for talking with your child about special learning needs

- Talk about the concept of special needs and what this means for learning.
- Provide specific feedback that helps your child understand how he or she learns best, such as "You seem to remember better when you get a chance to see the information."
- If appropriate, explain assessment results so your child understands his or her abilities and needs, and the implications for schooling and life.

- Explain that each person learns at his or her own speed, in his or her own way. For example, some children learn best by hearing material presented to them and some prefer to read or look at what they are expected to learn.
- Use terms and language your child will understand.
- Stress that your child is not alone with his or her difficulties. Parents, grandparents, siblings and school staff can all help with learning.
- Describe the assistance your child will be receiving in a concrete, realistic, positive manner.
- Discuss ideas for handling possible teasing from peers.
- Role-play ways to handle difficult situations at school.
- Seek resources for support and information. Assist your child, as he or she matures, to access these resources and become a self-advocate for his or her own education needs.
- Encourage your child to be an active participant in the learning team by participating in IPP conferences and setting realistic goals as he or she progresses in school, as appropriate.
- Assure your child that there is a full range of opportunities available to individuals with special needs.
- Introduce your child to books that deal with difficulties similar to those he or she faces. Children's literature can illustrate human relationships, conditions and situations in a rich and affecting way. Books afford children the opportunity to make connections between the events and characters in the stories and their own lives. This often lessens their sense of loneliness, confusion or isolation. Wisdom gained through reading and being read to can be applied in children's own lives. *See Appendix E, pages 97–99 for a list of books that may help your child understand his or her special learning needs.*

Offer encouragement

When families first learn that a child may have a special need, they may need time to adjust. This can also be a difficult time for the child. Encourage your child to stay focused on his or her strengths to counterbalance the challenges. All children have abilities, and there are many ways to recognize and nurture these.

"Words have the power to transform lives."
– Phillip White

Be prepared to help your child, but try to strengthen independence whenever possible. Offer encouragement and support to build your child's self-confidence.

Be specific and descriptive in your praise. For example:

"You did a great job of …"
"I see you learn much better when …"
"I have noticed improvements in …"
"Let's work together to …"
"I appreciate your hard work and efforts in …"
"How can I help you …?"
"I see a lot of work went into …"
"Thank you for sticking to the task of …"

Tips for encouraging confidence and independence

- Make a list of all your child's strengths and needs, and refer to that list often.
- If possible, help your child learn to describe his or her own thinking. Model this behaviour by describing your own thinking out loud.
- Emphasize the positive—recognize, nurture and build on your child's strengths. Set up situations where these strengths can be shared with others. Appreciation and acknowledgement from others builds greater confidence to try new and unfamiliar skills or tasks. Avoid comparing one child with another as it erodes the uniqueness of each individual.

- Provide opportunities for your child to learn new skills, such as playing a sport or learning a craft. Children need to feel competent and capable.
- Create and support opportunities for your child to experience the joy of helping someone else.
- Help your child take pride in his or her ethnic background. Share what you know about your family's heritage and roots, and discover more together through research and from other family members. This knowledge can help a child develop a deeper sense of identity.
- Establish consistent behavioural expectations. This will help children feel more secure and better able to handle a range of social experiences.
- Instill a "can-do" attitude at home to give your child confidence to try new things. When your child is unsuccessful, try to help him or her view it as a learning experience rather than failure by asking, "What did you learn from this?" and "What would you do differently next time?"

Teach decision-making skills

Confidence comes from having the problem-solving skills to make sound decisions in life. Children need a repertoire of skills to help them deal with varying challenges.

Use a simple problem-solving model, such as the following, to help your child work out problems.

- Use a calm down strategy, such as counting to ten or using self-talk.
- Identify the problem. Have your child state the problem in his or her own words. You may need to ask questions to help your child do this.
- Generate possible solutions. Don't judge any of the ideas.

- Narrow the choices by eliminating options that make your child uncomfortable or that may not be manageable.
- Weigh the pros and cons of the remaining solutions and then decide on the best choice. Ask, "What might happen if you tried that?"
- Talk about how to act on this decision and how to handle problems that arise.
- Act on the decision.
- Evaluate the decision. How well did the solution work? What could be done differently next time? What did you learn?

Model problem-solving skills for your child. Discuss some of the proactive and collaborative ways you work with others to find win-win solutions.

Build communication skills

Strengthening children's communication skills increases their opportunities to become confident, independent and successful adults. Effective communication skills let children express their needs and wishes, and develop social relationships.

Tips for building your child's communication skills

- Encourage your child to express his or her ideas, feelings, thoughts and views while you listen actively. Ensure your family routine includes opportunities to talk, such as during meal times, car rides, walks or before bedtime.
- Listen to your child. Offer a word or two to encourage communication. When genuine listening skills are modelled at home, your child will be more likely to reflect them in his or her interactions with others.

- Encourage your child to ask questions.
- Give your child opportunities to communicate with a variety of people—neighbours, extended family, younger children or professionals.
- Use role-playing to practise communication in different situations.

Foster friendships

Children with special needs may need encouragement and support in developing friendships. By interacting with others, children learn to resolve their own conflicts, understand social boundaries, gain awareness and appreciation of others, and develop sensitivity to the unique needs of those around them.

Tips for supporting your child in developing friendships

- Discuss the elements of friendship—respect, trust, acceptance, enjoyment.
- Encourage your child to invite friends to your home.
- Invite a friend to join your family at special events.
- Suggest groups, teams or organizations that your child might join—often friendships are forged in group settings in which children share common interests.
- Encourage your child to ask questions of and show interest in others.

Peer mentors

Peer mentors in the classroom can help children with special needs develop social and friendship skills. Peer mentors can serve as role-models, sources of information, readers, scribes and study buddies. Because they speak the same "language" and often have similar experiences, peer mentors can contribute to a relaxed learning situation.

Teach self-advocacy

Self-advocacy means speaking out and taking positive action to make your situation better. Children first learn self-advocacy skills by observing how parents, school staff and others advocate on their behalf. Modelling effective and collaborative advocacy skills is a wonderful way to prepare children for their eventual role in self-advocacy.

Children who learn self-advocacy skills when they are young are better equipped to become independent adults. Children who are strong self-advocates need to have a good understanding of how their disability affects their learning.

Tips for teaching your child self-advocacy skills

- Begin early by discussing learning strengths and needs with your child, as well as observations on how he or she learns best. Involve your child in conversations about program planning—just by listening he or she can learn about collaboration and problem solving.
- Start including your child in meetings with educators as soon as possible. Ensure there is time at school conferences for your child to report progress and express concerns.
- Help your child prepare for meetings or conversations with teachers and other situations involving his or her education. Take the time to help your child write down what he or she would like to discuss. Model and role-play appropriate interactions.
- Involve your child in planning and implementing IPPs. The student's input and involvement should increase as he or she proceeds through school.
- Provide opportunities for making plans and choices.

For more ideas on building self-advocacy skills see:

Make School Work for You: A Resource for Junior and Senior High Students Who Want to Be More Successful Learners (2001)
Available from the Learning Resources Centre (LRC)
Order #461426
Price $5.85
Order online at: www.lrc.learning.gov.ab.ca/

- Help your child set appropriate and realistic goals for learning and review success in achieving these goals.
- Involve your child in evaluating his or her own performance as much as possible.
- Help your child be organized and prepared. Self-advocates need to be informed and organized in order to be effective.
- Encourage your child to let others know when their efforts are appreciated. An important part of self-advocacy is the ability to positively influence others.
- Provide opportunities to meet others with special needs in order to learn from the experiences of these individuals. Videotapes of successful individuals can be inspiring for some children (and their families).
- Recognize how difficult self-advocacy can be and support the attempts your child makes.
- Understand that self-advocacy skills need to be demonstrated, role-played, practised and evaluated. Provide extensive guidance in the middle school/junior high years with greater expectations for independence in the high school years.
- Consult with your child's teachers about strategies and suggestions for teaching self-advocacy skills.

Parent Notebook

Encouraging things I can say to my child:

Ways I can support my child's friendships:

Ideas for maintaining my family's sense of hope and togetherness:

Parent Notebook

Sample questions I might discuss with my child's teachers about friendship and encouragement:

- How does my child get along with other children in the class?
- Have you noticed a particular type of encouragement that seems to be effective with my child?

Sample questions I might discuss with my child about friendship and encouragement:

- Who are your friends at school? What kinds of things do you do together? How do you get along?
- What kinds of things make you want to try harder?
- How would you explain your special learning needs to a new teacher or new friend?

Chapter 5:

Planning for Transitions

A transition is any event that results in changes to relationships, routines, expectations or roles. Transitions are a normal part of life and occur throughout the life cycle. For children, transitions occur at various times during their education programs. Starting school, moving from grade to grade and changing schools are common transitions for children.

While any child can have difficulty with transitions, children with special needs may have greater difficulty managing transitions in their lives. To minimize these difficulties, thoughtful transition planning is important.

Transition planning decisions need to be based on an understanding of the individual child. This means understanding the child's strengths, needs and goals, as well as those of the child's family. Transition planning should be dynamic and ongoing since preferences and circumstances regarding transition objectives may change over time. A written record of transition planning, including transition goals and strategies, should be included in IPPs.

Successful transitions involve input from the whole learning team, including parents, children, teachers and possibly community-based personnel, such as career counsellors or post-secondary school admission officers. Drawing on the knowledge of various team members results in informed decision making, the

acceptance of joint responsibility and a generous circle of support for the child.

As children move through the education system, they need to become more involved in planning their own transitions. Involvement in the planning process helps children develop an understanding of their strengths and needs. Transition planning also helps children become aware of the type of supports and accommodations available to them in dealing with their learning difficulties, and provides opportunities for them to develop much-needed self-advocacy and problem-solving skills.

Every child has the potential for benefiting from some type of post-secondary education or training. Planning for post-secondary studies begins as soon as young children express an interest in the kind of work they would like to do when they grow up. However, transition planning should focus not only on the academic skills needed for success, but also on helping children develop the ability to problem solve in new situations, monitor and regulate their own performance, and interact appropriately with peers and authority figures.

Successful transitions depend on:

- early and systematic planning
- consciously identifying hopes and dreams
- thoroughly exploring a variety of possibilities
- using appropriate strategies to help your child move from one stage to the next.

Early planning

Successful transitions require planning well in advance of the actual move. This ensures that planning is always future-oriented, that there is program continuity throughout your child's school years, and that necessary programs and supports are in place. For

example, the transition from high school to post-secondary settings requires informal planning beginning early in your child's education, and formal planning starting in junior high school. This gives you and your child time to become familiar with available services and settings, and time to put the necessary plans into action so your child will reach his or her goals.

At an early age, your child needs to understand that change and challenges are part of life. Children need encouragement and support to achieve small, but measurable successes. Celebrate your child's abilities and build on strengths. Personal skills and attitudes do affect an individual's approach to lifelong learning. Helping your child become more self-confident and self-aware ensures that your child will be better able to set realistic goals and develop the skills necessary to achieve these goals. Learning to manage transitions at an early age creates behaviours that are flexible, adaptable and capable in a world that is rapidly changing.

Identifying hopes and dreams

It is important to identify your child's strengths, abilities and talents, and incorporate them in programming decisions. You also need to help your child identify dreams and hopes for the future. This is especially important in planning for the transition between high school and a more independent adult life.

Talk to your child about his or her thoughts on post-secondary training, entering the work force, options for living situations, and the kinds of recreational and leisure activities they would like for the future. You also need to determine your own realistic wishes and preferences for your child, and develop a family vision for the future.

Exploring possibilities

Some individuals with special needs require specialized living and work settings as adults. Consider a variety of possibilities that may be available as your child moves from one stage to the next. For example, in planning for the transition from high school to post-secondary settings, consider all of the different options available.

When your child is still in junior high school, start investigating the services available in your community for adults with special needs. Learn about vocational and residential options in other areas and compare these to options in your area. When your child is in senior high school, start meeting with different adult service providers to explore options in more detail.

Be informed about the various possibilities by asking questions. For example, when you are planning for your child's transition from junior to senior high school, ask what kind of community-based work experience is available for your child in the high school program. Evaluate how each option meets the skills, needs and dreams of your child.

Bridging from one stage to the next

Transition may be a challenging time for your child. You are the one constant factor as your child moves from one setting to another. Since you know your child best, you will be aware of the areas where your child needs further support and reinforcement to cope with new challenges. This could include strengthening self-advocacy and decision-making skills, independent problem solving and positive feelings about their own abilities.

As your child moves to a new program or school, you may have many questions. Here are some sample questions you might ask.

- What type of strategies will be used to help my child with his or her learning needs?
- How does the program measure progress?
- Will my child follow the regular grade curriculum?
- How long will my child stay in this program?
- What plans do we need to make for future placements?
- Is this a new or established program?
- Will there be students in the class with similar learning needs as my child?
- How can I ensure that teachers are aware of my child's individual learning goals and dreams for the future?
- How will this new program or school further our goals?

Children in transition need to know that there are support systems in place for them if they face personal or academic difficulties. Reassure your child that there will be teachers or employers ready to support him or her in this new segment of life. Involve siblings, extended family members, friends, neighbours or others who can contribute to your child's successful transition.

Transition tips for elementary school

- Be aware of your child's eventual need for independence.
- Be sure the IPP addresses skills that will help your child become more independent.
- Help your child become comfortable with new surroundings and people by arranging to visit new classrooms and meet new teachers.
- Identify the skills your child will need in the next environment and support opportunities to learn these skills.

- Get your child involved in community-based recreational activities.
- Listen to your child's concerns about transitions. Discuss the transition and highlight the positive aspects of a new environment.
- As a family, celebrate the skills and aptitudes your child is developing. These are the building blocks for new skills and the steps toward your child's dream.

Transition tips for junior high school

- Support the school's efforts to provide service learning and work experiences.
- Ensure that the IPP addresses skills your child will need in a variety of settings.
- If possible, teach your child to use the public transportation system.
- Explore appropriate assistive technologies and encourage keyboarding skills.
- Begin exploring career interests.
- Encourage your child to identify his or her learning strengths.
- Actively encourage your child to participate in goal setting.
- Help your child learn how to monitor his or her own progress. Help your child develop a plan to share this information with the learning team.
- Identify success and build upon it.
- Identify approaches that are not working and begin to search for alternative methods and plans.

For more information on choosing high school courses see:
A Credit to Yourself
www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/other.asp

Transition tips for high school

- Be a mentor to your child. Listen to your child's hopes and dreams, and continue to support them.
- Help your child explore the consequences of decisions and how beliefs, attitudes and values affect life and career decision making.
- Encourage independence and provide opportunities for community involvement.
- Continue to explore appropriate accommodations and assistive technologies.
- Explore post-secondary institution opportunities and community-based services, such as Alberta Human Resources and Employment.
- Know the entrance requirements of post-secondary institutions that your child might attend.
- Ensure your son or daughter has all the necessary documentation to receive support in post-secondary settings.
- Make sure that appropriate educational, vocational and residential services are in place before your son or daughter graduates.

See Appendix F, page 100 for a sample transition checklist to complete with your son or daughter.

Beyond the school system

Transition planning often involves investigating opportunities for post-secondary training. Over the last decade, the range of post-secondary options available to all students has greatly expanded. Colleges, universities, community agencies and private training companies are now more willing and able to offer appropriate training opportunities for adults with special needs. A number of colleges and universities now have specialized services to support students with special needs.

Some institutions' application forms have a box to check or a line to complete that identifies a disability. The disability services office will contact the student to discuss what kind of support will be needed. If the application form does not have a place for self-disclosure, it's up to students (and if required, their parents) to contact the disability services office.

For most students, Canada Study Grants and Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE) funding will cover disability-related supports that students need to complete their education. To ensure this funding, students will need documentation about their disability and the supports they received in high school. If they do not have sufficient documentation, they will have to be assessed so appropriate supports can be identified. These assessments are coordinated by the institution's disability services office and can take up to four months to complete.

The disability services office will use information from documentation and assessments to develop a service plan. This plan, also known as an education plan or accommodation plan, outlines the supports students are eligible for. Every student's plan is different and could include services such as the following:

- note taking
- alternate format texts (braille, large print, audio)
- exam accommodations
- assistive technology
- interpreters
- captioning services
- tutoring.

For more information see:

National Educational Association of Disabled Students
www.neads.ca

Most disability services offices have orientations for new students with disabilities. A few campuses also have student-run disability organizations.

Disability services offices will advocate for students, but first they will encourage students to be their own self-advocates. Most disability service offices believe that students need to be equal partners in their education and take responsibility for the accommodations they need. By learning these skills in school, students will be able to carry them into the work place and community.

Several campuses offer Inclusive Post Secondary Education (IPSE) programs that provide adults with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to participate in a modified post-secondary educational experience. Students are included in regular college or university classes as auditing students and are supported to participate to their fullest potential. Their education goes beyond the classroom to encompass three main components:

- relationship opportunities
- life enriching experiences
- career development and education.

These programs are currently available at the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan College, the University of Calgary, Lethbridge Community College, and Red Deer College. Check the Web sites of these institutions to see current programs offered.

As you explore these options, consider the following questions.

- How will this agency or program meet my son or daughter's learning and vocational needs?
- What is their philosophy and is it compatible with our family's values and goals?
- What kind of success has this agency or program had?
- What is their commitment to individualized programming?
- What supports and accommodations do they provide?

- What is their commitment to community-based programming?
- What are the criteria for admission?
- Is there a waiting list? If so, how long?
- What are the qualifications and training of the service providers?
- How are parents and family members involved in service delivery?
- How long does the follow-up and support of the agency or program last?
- What are the costs and fees of the program?

See *Appendix G, page 101 for a listing of government agencies that you may need to contact during transition planning.*

Parent Notebook

My child's strengths are:

_____

_____

_____

My child's skills are:

_____

_____

_____

My child's interests are:

_____

_____

_____

My goals and dreams for my child's future are:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Parent Notebook

Sample questions I might discuss with my child's teachers about transition:

- What skills does my child need to develop so he or she will be successful in school next year?
- Is there a special interest or strength my child has that surprised you? If so, how were you able to use this in the classroom?
- Based on what you have learned about my child this year, what suggestions do you have for next year's teachers?

Sample questions I might discuss with my child:

- What kinds of things would you like to be different next school year?
- What would you like your new teachers to know about you?
- What are your goals and dreams for the future?

Chapter 6:

Resolving Differences

Parents have a right and a responsibility to participate in decisions about the education of their children. Although all children rely on their parents to ensure they have an appropriate programming and school placement, children with special needs have a greater dependence on adult involvement.

School boards are required to make every reasonable effort at the school and district level to resolve concerns collaboratively with parents. However, despite these efforts there may be differences of opinion about the education of children with special needs between parents (or in some cases, an older student) and the school. When this happens, there are a number of strategies for successfully resolving these differences.

Voicing your concerns at the local level

Always try to resolve issues with the people who are working with your child. This means meeting with the learning team and looking for win-win solutions.

Tips for resolving differences at the school level

- Begin by requesting a meeting with your child's teachers. Indicate what the topic will be. This information allows teachers to schedule an appropriate amount of time, and be better prepared to answer your questions and address particular concerns.
- Be prepared. Write down questions and concerns you want to address.
- Focus your concerns on your child's learning needs. Decide what is most important and focus your energy on that.
- Be prepared to consider and share possible solutions.
- Take time to consider what you would like the outcome of the meeting to be. This will help you focus your discussion and problem solving.
- If possible, involve your child in finding a solution.
- Ask as many questions as needed to ensure you have a clear understanding of your child's progress and programming.
- Take notes, especially with respect to recommendations and timelines. Confirm those commitments both verbally at the end of the meeting and through a follow-up letter.
- If you feel that additional information is necessary, schedule another conference at the conclusion of your meeting.
- Give teachers and the school time to implement changes.
- If you come to an agreement that a certain change will be made, establish how you will know if this change is happening and that it is working. Discuss the outcomes that have been agreed upon and decide when progress on these outcomes will be reviewed.

If you cannot resolve the issue with your child's teacher, the next step is to request a meeting with the school principal. Let the principal know your concerns. Also let the principal know that you

have discussed this issue with the teacher and have not been able to come to a satisfactory agreement. The teacher should participate in the meeting with the principal. This will ensure all partners can contribute information, perspectives and possible solutions.

For more information see:
School Act
www.qp.gov.ab.ca/documents/acts/S03.cfm

If the issue cannot be resolved at the school level, the Alberta *School Act* Section 123 states that school boards shall establish a process for appealing school district decisions that significantly affect a child's education, such as disagreements over identification of a special need or program placement. The school principal can provide information on the appeal procedure in your district. Typically, parents and school staff prefer to work out agreements collaboratively at the school or district level but in some instances the next step is at the district level.

Voicing your concerns at the district level

Appeal procedures vary from district to district but all procedures should be built on the following principles.

- The appeal process should be fair, timely and open. It should ensure that parents and district staff know in advance how the appeal process works, and have reasonable opportunity to prepare and present their case.
- The process should have the flexibility to accommodate different kinds of disputes.
- Parents, or students who are 16 or older, should have the right to appeal at least one level above the level of the employee who made the decision being appealed. Whoever hears the appeal should be the person who will make the appeal decision. For example, if a principal made a decision, a person in a supervisory position over the principal should hear the appeal and uphold or overturn the original decision made by the principal.

- The person who hears the appeal should not have been involved in the decision being appealed.

School boards have an obligation to inform parents of their right to appeal and must provide written copies of the district's process. The district policy should be consistent with the principles above, and should describe specifically how the process works and how long it takes. If the board itself does not hear the appeal, the policy should clearly state who will assume this responsibility.

Voicing your concerns at the provincial level

If an appeal to the school board is completed and parents disagree with the decision and feel it does not meet the learning needs of their child, they may write to the Minister of Learning and ask for a review of the board decision. School boards have an obligation to advise parents of their right to request that the Minister review the board's decision if they are not satisfied with that decision. A student who is 16 years of age or older may also request a review. The Minister of Learning may review a board decision on some specific matters, including the special education placement for a student with special needs.

The review will only assess the situation for one school year because that situation may change over time. For example, the board may not offer a program in the year of the review, but may develop an appropriate program later. Or, the student's learning needs may change so that the program determined to be appropriate at the review may no longer match the student's learning needs.

A Review Coordinator is assigned to the case, contacts the parents and school board for any required additional information, and makes a recommendation on whether or not to review the matter.

The Review Coordinator considers the following questions.

- Is there a board decision on the matter for which the review is requested?
- What are the issues in dispute? Are there other mechanisms for resolving the dispute?
- Has the parent worked with the school jurisdiction on resolving this issue?

The *School Act* states that the Minister **may** review the placement of a student in a special education program. This means there is no guaranteed right to a review. The Minister has the authority to determine if the matter will be reviewed, and the way in which the matter will be reviewed.

The Review Coordinator also assesses the possibility of using mediation or another method to resolve the dispute. Whenever possible, the Minister prefers that a dispute between parents and the board be settled with an agreement that both parties accept. A Minister's decision on the other hand, favours one party's position over the other.

If the matter is to be reviewed, Alberta Learning appoints a Review Committee and establishes Terms of Reference that describe what the committee will do, what information they will consider and the scope of their review.

The Review Coordinator will ask both the parents and the school board to provide a written submission of reports, statements, results from assessments, correspondence, the student's individualized program plan (IPP), and other information related to the student's program placement. Both the parents and the school board also provide a list of people that they suggest the Review Committee should interview. The parents and the school board review all the submissions.

The Review Committee then begins interviews. The review is not a trial, nor is it conducted like a court of law. It is a review of the circumstances relating to the student's learning. The Review Committee reviews the documentation and conducts interviews in order to develop an understanding of the student's learning needs and of the program offered to the student. The Review Committee may also visit the student's current placement and the program that was offered to the student.

If parents want an advocate to accompany them to the interview, they should let the Review Coordinator know before the interview so that the role of the advocate can be clarified. An advocate might be a family member, a friend or any person willing to provide informal support at the interview.

If parents wish to have a lawyer represent them during the review, they must inform the Review Coordinator ahead of time so that the school board has the opportunity to decide if they want representation by legal counsel. If parents don't inform the Review Coordinator that a lawyer will represent them, the interviews are postponed to allow the board time to make a decision regarding legal counsel.

The Review Committee uses the information collected to develop a *Summary of Information*. The summary is the key document of the review. It relates the collected information to the terms of reference. It also describes the important aspects of the student's learning, the program the board offered, and any other issues related to the parents' appeal to the board. The Review Coordinator sends the *Summary of Information* to both parties. The parents and the school board check it for accuracy. If parents or the school board disagree with any information in this summary, they inform the Review Committee.

The Review Committee considers each statement carefully, and then writes a *Report to the Minister*. The Report to the Minister includes the following sections:

- Terms of Reference for the review
- the original Summary of Information
- statements of agreement or disagreement
- the Review Committee's responses to the statements of disagreement
- the Review Committee's recommendation to uphold or overturn the board's decision.

The Review Committee may make other recommendations related to changes to board policy, the assignments of costs, alternate placements or other matters.

The Minister reads the Report and makes a decision. If the Minister upholds the decision of the school board, the student will continue in the same program, or the parents will not be reimbursed for expenses they incurred. If the Minister overturns the board decision, the board has to provide the program, or provide funding for the program that the Minister recommends. The Minister may choose not to accept the Review Committee's recommendation and make another decision.

The Minister's decision is final. There is no further appeal or review within government. For example, the parents or the board cannot ask the Premier of Alberta to review the Minister's decision.

There are few reviews by the Minister each year. In most cases, parents and educators prefer to resolve differences at the school and district level.

For more information on a Review by the Minister, contact the Team Leader of Disputes Management Team at 780–427–7235 or see Policy 3.5.1—Review by the Minister www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/polplan/polregs/351.asp

Special Needs Tribunal

Special Needs Tribunal legislation was established to provide school boards with a method to deal with students whose needs cannot be met within programs offered by the board. Only a board can initiate a request for a Tribunal. Parents cannot initiate the request.

Since the legislation was enacted in 1988, there have been fewer than 30 students referred for this process. Most students who require a Special Needs Tribunal have a number of severe disabilities. Some students may need intravenous or gastrostomy feeding. Some students have severe behavioural needs and some have a combination of physical and mental needs that require intensive support services.

When needs are severe enough, a school board may feel that its programs cannot serve the student adequately or safely. However, every individual who, at September 1 of a year, is six years of age or older and younger than 19 years of age is entitled to an education program.

When a board determines that it cannot provide an education program that meets the special needs of a student, nor direct the student to an appropriate program, the board requests that the Minister of Learning convene a Special Needs Tribunal. In the meantime, the board provides programming and services to meet the student's special needs as far as possible.

At the Minister's request, the Director of the Governance and Program Delivery Branch identifies one or more people to appoint to the Tribunal and notifies the parents and the board. The Tribunal determines the process they will use and communicates this to the parents and the board.

The Special Needs Tribunal, in consultation with parents and the board, will:

- verify that the board cannot meet the student's special needs in a program that it can provide
- assess the student's education needs and develop or approve a special needs plan that is consistent with the needs of the student
- consult with health, social and other appropriate agencies in the community
- show which of the student's special needs cannot be met by the board and why, and, where possible, indicate ways in which the student's special needs might be met
- identify responsibility for administering the individualized program plan (IPP) and for funding between the board and the provincial government.

For more information see:
Policy 3.5.2—Special Needs Tribunal
www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/polplan/polregs/352.asp

Once the Special Needs Tribunal has heard all aspects of the case, it will prepare a written report and a ruling on the programming to be offered. The ruling of the Tribunal is binding on all parties. The decisions of the Tribunal are reviewed every three years or as directed by the Tribunal. The Minister of Learning, upon written request from either the school board or parents, may review the decisions of a tribunal.

Parent Notebook

Ways to keep informed about my child's program:

_____

_____

_____

Issues and concerns I have:	Possible solutions:
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

	Yes	Not yet
♦ I have met the school principal.	☐	☐
♦ I am aware of the school district's appeal process.	☐	☐

Chapter 7:

Keeping Informed

"To be thrown on one's own resources is to be cast in the very lap of fortune."
– Benjamin Franklin

This handbook provides some of the information you need to help support your child with special needs, but this is just a starting point. The more information you have about your child's learning needs, programs and issues, the better you will be able to positively impact your child's future. The information you acquire through further research could help you understand, support, guide and mentor your child with greater confidence and skill. Researching educational issues may provide you with valuable information to consider when making decisions about your child's education.

How do I choose issues to research?

During your child's schooling, you may seek information on a variety of topics, from developmental issues to instructional strategies. Sometimes, figuring out what question to ask is a difficult task. Try brainstorming to create a list of questions. Here is a sampling of specific types of questions that parents of children with special needs might research.

- How can I help improve my child's reading skills?
- Does homework really help children? And if it does, how can I help my child?
- How could my child benefit from computer technology?
- How do FM sound systems affect student performance?
- What are some ways to support my child's spelling skills?
- What should I do if my gifted child is underachieving?
- How can I help my child plan for a career?

Narrow down your questions

Pare your list down to the most important questions and try to specify exactly what you need to know. For example, if you decide to research more about attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), your questions might focus on current medical research and educational literature. Think about the kinds of information you need. Are you looking for screening information? Do you want to know how AD/HD affects learning and behaviour? What are the controversial issues? Are some treatments more effective than others? What kinds of things can you do at home? What can you expect the school to do? What are the long-term educational and health implications? Write down these and other questions you have about attention deficit disorder.

Tips for finding information

For more information see:
Appendix D: Provincial Parent Groups

- ***People*** can be excellent resources to direct and focus your inquiries. Consider staff from schools, parent groups, community agencies, government institutions and librarians.

- ***Libraries*** should be one of the first places to start your research. Often just phoning the reference desk at your local library will provide enough information to focus your research. In addition to the local public library, there are libraries in universities, colleges and government departments. The credibility of print material found in a library is good because these resources are selected by librarians. As well, librarians may be able to recommend reliable sources elsewhere, such as good sites to visit on the Internet.

- ***Print resources*** can provide a variety of information. Newspapers are accessible and current, and provide

generalized information. Magazines or periodicals provide information that is more specialized than newspaper information. Your local library's copy of the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* or the *Canadian Periodical Index* provides the names of publications in your subject area. Books, though often less current than periodicals, cover topics in greater detail. Other printed material, such as pamphlets, annual reports and newsletters, provide information of a general nature that may help direct your inquiry.

- The ***Internet*** has a huge amount of information about almost every topic imaginable. The cautionary note to any user of the Internet is that you must check the reliability of the source. Anyone can set up a Web site and offer information. Try to determine the source of the Web site and the credentials of the Web site owner. If the Web site is owned by a government or well-known source, the information may be more credible than if the site is owned by someone without credentials or who is anonymous. Online resources are often linked through a library's home page to other virtual online resources. Going from the library's Web site out into the Internet can save time and help ensure reliability.

- ***Television, film and audiocassettes*** provide information on both general and specific topics and issues.

Tips for checking the reliability of a source

You can use the 5Ws + H to evaluate the source of information by asking the following six questions.

- *Who is the author?* Where does the author work—at a recognized institution or government? Have other people mentioned the author? For Web sites, is the author or organization clearly stated?

- *What is the purpose?* What is the author's purpose for writing the article? Who is the audience? Is the information factual or propaganda—does the author use facts or emotions to get his or her point across?
- *When was the material created?* For print material, check the publication date and whether this is the first edition or a revision of the material. For a Web site, check whether links still work and look at the last time the site was updated. Out-of-date material may present information and statistics that are unreliable.
- *Where was the source published or created?* Is the publisher or journal reputable? Is the journal reviewed? Books or periodicals that are self-published may have a hidden agenda. For Web sites, certain domain names may indicate greater reliability. For example, the ending ".edu" signifies an American university and ".gov" is reserved for the Canadian government, both of which are reliable sources.
- *How can you tell if the source is accurate?* Double-check your facts and sources by comparing them with other facts and sources. Can you find the same information in three other sources? Consider whether the source might be biased or uninformed. Authors or Web sites might be speaking about something that is beyond their level of expertise. They may have used unreliable sources in the first place and passed this information on to you. Or they may have hidden agendas, for example, trying to sell you a product. If the material is a book, see if you can find a review of the book to determine how others have assessed it.
- *Why should I use this source?* You may be able to get information quicker from another source. If you can't verify the source, you might want to leave it and search for a piece by a known author.

Compare sources

The more information you find, the better your understanding of the issue will be. When you use only one source of information, you can't be sure that it is current, accurate or complete. Some information presented as fact may be unsupported opinion. As a general guideline, try to gather information from at least three sources.

When you feel you have enough information, review your notes. Reread the print material you found. You may note that some of the information is contradictory or does not support what you have learned. With controversial issues, where people have taken sides, you have to determine the reliability of the supporters for each side. Make your decision about which side to support by evaluating the reliability of the sources.

Using the Internet

Most information on the Internet is stored using a tree structure, just like the information stored on your computer. The root directory leads to directories and subdirectories like the trunk and branches of a tree. Hypertext links let you jump to related subjects; when you click on these words, you move to a new section of the Web site, or to a new Web site.

Consider using the services offered on the Internet for your research, e.g., the World Wide Web, chat rooms, or live events using video and audio. You can also use e-mail to write to contacts as well as to send queries using mailing lists, newsgroups and Web forums.

Search engines

A search engine is an index of information on the Internet. Since different search engines access different areas of the Web, learn how to use three or four. Whenever you use a search engine, read its tips for advanced research to learn how to limit the search.

Search engines conduct searches using keywords. The best way to choose the word or words is to select the rarest word in your phrase. For example, instead of typing "choosing a tutor," you would simply use "tutor" for your search. If you have the choice, specify the range of dates you expect the material to have been produced. This will ensure you get current research.

The following is a list of commonly-used search engines:

www.google.com
www.hotbot.com
www.altavista.com
www.excite.com
www.beaucoup.com
www.yahoo.com
www.journalismnet.com
www.dogpile.com (presents information taken from a number of search engines).

You may also wish to access media sites, such as www.cbc.ca, www.bbc.co.uk and www.cnn.com.

Evaluating Internet information

Because the material available on the Internet ranges from fiction to opinion to fact, it is up to you to evaluate the source of information. As a general rule, assess the author's credentials and the quality of the publication or Web site, determine if the material has been reviewed before publication, and consider the comprehensiveness and tone of the material.

Using the Library

The reference librarian at your local library can show you how to use library resources, and which database or periodical index to use to continue researching on your own. Periodical indexes provide authors, titles and abstract information for articles published in magazines, newspapers and other periodicals. The broadest index of popular consumer magazines is called the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*. To access more specialized information, use indexes that are organized according to subject areas, for example, the *Education Index*, *Index Medicus*, *Psychological Abstracts*, *Social Science and Humanities Index* or *Applied Science and Technology Index*.

To find the articles you want to read, make a note of the information listed in the index:

- title of periodical, volume number, issue date
- author's name
- title of article
- page numbers of article.

You will then need to locate the specific periodical within the library.

Many libraries have connected their databases together into a virtual library where you can locate information outside the four walls of the library. From online resources, you may access encyclopedias and dictionaries, Canadian sources like *Electric Library Canada Plus*, and magazine or newspaper articles. Through the *Canadian Periodical Index*, you can access specialized newsletters, the Health Reference Centre, the General Reference Centre, CPI.Q (a list of Canadian and international journals, magazines and other reference material), and the Business Index. For example, to find recent articles about "self-advocacy skills," type the phrase into a number of search areas in the periodical index.

The NEOS Library Consortium is a collaboration of libraries across Alberta. NEOS has a Web site at www.neoslibraries.ca that allows you to access collections from government departments, college and university libraries, and hospital libraries. This powerful Web site offers Albertans access to a wide range of materials, from conference proceedings to government documents. To get a NEOS card, contact one of the libraries listed on the Web site.

Contacting community agencies

Through your research, you may find associations and community agencies that are available for further information. For example, many community associations have their own Web sites, often with specific contact information. Keep a record of those that interest you. Make contact by phone, e-mail or letter to find out more about their services and how they could help you with your search. Always be sure to describe your project and offer to provide them with your findings. This type of communication encourages dialogue and makes it easier for you to return to the association with further requests. Consider writing a brief script of what you want to say and keeping it by the phone as you speak. Keep a pen handy to jot down the person's answers.

Tips for tracking your research

There are different ways to organize and store research, so choose the method that works best for you. Consider the following options.

- Keep all news articles, phone numbers and accumulated research in a labelled, legal-size file folder or large envelope.
- Use an expanding file divided into sections to separate data by subject.

- Store information in a three-ring binder by taping or gluing articles to hole-punched paper, or use clear plastic sleeves to hold information.
- Record your findings onto audiocassette.

You may also consider the following tips to keep organized.

- Make a list of contact names and phone numbers, and staple it to the front of your folder or envelope.
- Record the date, time and place for each piece of research you collect, including notes taken while you are on the telephone. Write this information directly onto articles.
- Record your own ideas, thoughts and feelings about the information you find as you go along.
- Create a chart to track key information.

Topic	Contact name and number	Date	Notes

Sharing information

What is your goal for sharing your research? Do you want to create awareness? Do you want to start a dialogue? Do you want to prompt some specific action? Once you determine your goal, write down the steps to reach it. Who you share your information with, and in what context, will depend on your purpose.

Parent Notebook

Questions I would like to research:

_____

_____

_____

Possible sources of information:

_____

_____

_____

Sample questions I might discuss with my child's teachers about researching issues:

- Can you suggest any resources and other references related to my child's special needs?
- Is there a specific area of research that might hold promise for my child, now or in the future?

Appendix A:

School Act Reference Sections

Parents should be aware of relevant sections of the *School Act* pertaining to students with special needs. The *School Act* is available for purchase from Queen's Printer Bookstores in Edmonton (780–427–4952) and Calgary (403–297–6251) or online at www.qp.gov.ab.ca. The *Act* can also be downloaded at no charge at www.qp.gov.ab.ca/documents/acts/S03.cfm.

Interpretation

Section 1(1)(m)	Defines "independent student"
Section 1(2)	Defines "parent" under the *Act*
Section 1(3)	Defines entitlements of an independent student

Part 1–Students

Section 8	Right of access to education
Section 9	Language of instruction (English)
Section 10	Language of instruction (French)
Section 11	Other languages of instruction
Section 12	Students
Section 13	Compulsory education
Section 14	Enforcing school attendance
Section 15	Attendance at school
Section 16	Liability for damage to property by student

Part 2–Schools

Division 1: Schools Operated by a Board

Section 23	Student records

Appendix A: *School Act* Reference Sections—continued

Part 3–School Boards

Division 1: Provision of Educational and Associated Services

Section 44	Resident student
Section 45	Responsibility to students
Section 47	Special education program
Section 48	Special Needs Tribunal
Section 49	Tuition fees
Section 51	Transportation
Section 52	Transport by parent

Division 2: Operation and Management

Section 59	Powers of separate school boards
Section 60	Powers of boards
Section 70	Open meetings
Section 75	Inspection of documents
Section 78	Accountability of board

Part 5–Appeals

Division 1: Appeals Concerning Student Matters

Section 123	Appeal to board
Section 124	Review by the Minister
Section 125	Powers on review

Appendix B:

Basic Learning Policies

For more information on Basic Learning policies, see the *Basic Learning Policies, Regulations and Forms Manual*. Your local school jurisdiction office should have a copy of the manual. Copies of the policies are available on the Web at: www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/02pdfiles/hbk5p12.pdf or from the Special Programs Branch, Alberta Learning, 780–422–6326.

Policy No.

1.6.1 Educational Placement of Students with Special Needs
1.6.2 Special Education
1.8.1 Services for Students and Children
3.5.1 Review by the Minister
3.5.2 Special Needs Tribunal

Appendix C:

Family Goal Setting

Child's Name: _____

Date: _____

Our child has these five strengths:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Our child has these five areas of need:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Appendix C: Family Goal Setting—continued

A. Our first goal for our child this school year is:

_____

_____

This is what we will do at home to help achieve this goal:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B. Our second goal for our child this school year is:

_____

_____

This is what we will do at home to help achieve this goal:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

We agree to review these goals at each reporting period.

We will review these goals _____
Date

Consider sharing these goals with the other members of your child's learning team.

Appendix D:

Provincial Parent Groups

This listing is just a sample of provincial groups that offer support and services to parents of children with special needs. Some of these groups will have local chapters. Check Web sites for more information and links to other groups.

Alberta Associations for Bright Children (AABC)
Telephone: 780–422–0362
Web site: www.freenet.edmonton.ab.ca/aabc/index.html

Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL)
Telephone: 780–451–3055
Toll free: 1–800–252–7556
Web site: www.aacl.org/

Alberta Association of the Deaf
Fax: 780–430–9489
Web site: www.deafalberta.org/AAD/index.htm

Alberta Association for the Dependent Handicapped
Telephone: 780–481–8294

Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities
Telephone: 780–488–9088
Toll free: 1–800–387–2514
Web site: www.accd.net/

Alberta Home and School Councils' Association (AHSCA)
Telephone: 780–545–9867
Toll free: 1–800–661–3470
Web site: www.ahsca.ab.ca/

Alberta Society of Visually Impaired
Telephone: 780–962–8128

Autism Society of Alberta
Telephone: 780–453–3971

Canadian Council of the Blind Alberta Division
Telephone: 780–462–8879

Cerebral Palsy Association in Alberta
Telephone: 780–477–8030
Toll free: 1–888–477–8030
Web site: www.cpalberta.com/

Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta (LDAA)
Telephone: 780–448–0360

To find local associations and groups in your community, talk with other parents, school staff, and community and health service providers.

Appendix E:

Samples of Children's Literature

that promote understanding of children with special needs

Please note: These listings do not imply Alberta Learning's approval for the use of these resources. These titles are provided as an illustration of how literature can be used to support and enhance learning and understanding. Parents and teachers need to preview any books and assess their appropriateness before using them with children.

Berkus, Clara Widess. *Charlsie's Chuckle*. Woodbine House, 1992.

A young boy who has Down Syndrome shows that all children have the ability to make significant contributions to society.

Bouchard, David. *If Sarah Will Take Me*. Orca Book Publishers, 1997.

Sensitive, poetic words that reveal the passionate life of Robb, a young man who is quadriplegic. He painted the stunning illustrations in this book.

Edwards, Becky and David Armitage. *My Brother Sammy*. Bloomsbury Publishing Co., 1999.

A heartwarming book about a boy named Sammy who has autism. It reminds readers that patience and acceptance are integral ingredients in all human relationships.

Flemming, Virginia. *Be Good to Eddie Lee*. Philomel, 1993.

Mama has always told Cristy to be good to Eddie Lee because he is "different." But did that mean she had to let him follow her around all summer? This sensitive portrayal of a young child who has Down Syndrome shows young readers the joy of unconditional love.

Fox, Paula. *Radiance Descending*. DK Publishing Inc., 1997.

Paul spends seven years avoiding and ignoring his brother Jacob who has Down Syndrome. Finally, his beloved grandfather helps him embrace Jacob in a special relationship.

Gilmore, Rachna. *A Screaming Kind of Day*. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1999.

Scully, a girl who is deaf, is frustrated as she fights with her brother and longs to be outside to experience the rain and sounds of summer.

Appendix E: Samples of Children's Literature—continued

Gregory, Nan. *How Smudge Came.* Red Deer College Press, 1995.
Cindy, a girl who is mentally challenged, works as a cleaning assistant at a hospital. How she attracts a loving puppy, Smudge, is a sensitive story that reveals how the spirit of love and generosity can transcend generations, conditions and societal roles.

Janover, Caroline. *Zipper, The Kid With ADHD.* Woodbine Press, 1997.
Children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) will be able to relate to this novel. The story entertains as well as teaches. Zipper, a fifth grader, works hard to learn important life lessons and reach his goals.

Little, Jean. *Mine for Keeps.* Puffin, 1996.
Sally Copeland returns home after spending five years at a special school for children with cerebral palsy. The story of her adjustment back into the regular world—her fears, challenges, accomplishments and joys—are all revealed in this powerful story.

Lucado, Max. *You Are Special.* Crossway Books, 1997.
An amazing book on how Punchinello develops a strong sense of self-worth in spite of what other people thought of him.

Martin, Bill Jr. *Knots on a Counting Rope.* Henry Hold and Co., 1987.
A sensitive story of love, courage and inspiration as a grandfather tells his grandson, who is blind, about how he faced his own challenges in life.

McGillivray, Barb. *If Only I Could Fly.* Essence of Elly Publishing, 2000.
A mother's story of her son who is severely disabled. An inspiration to children experiencing challenges in following their dreams.

Millman, Isaac. *Moses Goes to School.* Frances, Foster Books, 2000.
Moses, who is deaf, goes to a special school where students communicate through signing. The author follows Moses through a typical day at school. Readers can learn signs for key words and ideas.

Appendix E: Samples of Children's Literature—continued

Mills, Joyce C., Ph.D. *Little Tree: A Story for Children With Serious Medical Problems*. Magination Press, 1992.

In addition to the physical toll experienced by children with serious medical problems, there are usually emotional difficulties that are harder to see and even harder to ease. *Little Tree* provides a place for parents and children to turn for help.

Rau, Dana Meachen. *Secret Code*. Children's Press, 1998.

Oscar, who is blind, teaches Lucy to read Braille.

Rorby, Ginny. *Dolphin Sky*. The Putman and Grosset Group, 1996.

Set in the Everglades, this emotional novel involves Buddy Martin, a 12-year-old girl who has difficulties learning to read.

Shrene, Susan. *The Gift of the Girl Who Couldn't Hear*. Tambourine Books, 1991.

Lilly, who has been deaf since birth, tries out for a singing role in a Grade 7 musical performance. Her best friend, Eliza, tries to teach her to sing. A story of courage, outreach and self-discovery.

Simmons, Karen L. *Little Rainman: Autism Through the Eyes of a Child*. Future Horizons, 1996.

This book was written as a way for children who have autism to better understand themselves. It also helps caregivers, teachers and others see the world through the eyes of a child with autism.

Smith, Mark. *Pay Attention, Slosh!* Albert Whitman & Co., 1997.

Eight-year-old John hates being a bundle of super-charged energy! It frustrates him to be unable to control himself or concentrate. With the help of his parents, teachers and doctor, he learns to cope with his attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD).

Stuve-Bodeena, Stephanie. *We'll Paint the Octopus Red*. Woodbine House, 1998.

Emma and her father discuss what they'll do when the new baby arrives. When the new baby is born with Down Syndrome, they discuss how they will work together as a family.

Appendix F:

Transition Checklist*

(from high school to post-secondary training)

This transition checklist serves as a guide to the types of activities that a student should be engaged in during high school. Work through the checklist with your son or daughter as a starting point for assessing your transition plan and identifying items that still need to be accomplished. Encourage your son or daughter to complete as many of these items as he or she can independently.

We have:	*Yes*	*Not yet*
➢ an updated copy of the most recent educational assessment	☐	☐
➢ a copy of the most recent Individualized Program Plan (IPP)	☐	☐
➢ copies of transcripts	☐	☐
➢ pertinent medical information	☐	☐
➢ contacted the special needs offices of the institutions we are considering	☐	☐
➢ prepared a set of questions about accommodations available at these institutions	☐	☐
➢ a record of the assistive technology that has been used successfully	☐	☐
➢ checked the accommodation policies of the institutions we are considering	☐	☐
➢ prepared a list of successes and accomplishments at school and in the community	☐	☐
➢ a summary of career searches	☐	☐
➢ visited the campuses (electronically or in person) of the institutions we are considering	☐	☐
➢ researched funding sources and financial assistance opportunities	☐	☐
➢ completed the goals of the transition plan.	☐	☐

*Adapted with permission from Calgary Learning Centre (Calgary, AB).

Appendix G:

Government Agencies

- *Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped* (AISH)
  This service is designed for individuals who have no other sources of income.
  www3.gov.ab.ca/hre/aish/index.asp

  Contact the Alberta RITE operator at 310–0000 and ask to be connected toll-free to the AISH office nearest you.

- *Public Guardian Office*
  Provides a legal guardian for adults who are unable to care for themselves and make reasonable judgements about personal matters under the *Dependent Adult Act*.
  www3.gov.ab.ca/hre/opg/links/other_pgs.asp

  Contact the Alberta RITE operator at 310–0000 and ask to be connected toll-free to the office nearest you. There are offices located in Red Deer, Calgary and Lethbridge.

- *Public Trustee Office*
  Provides administration of financial matters of persons who have been declared by the courts incapable of managing their financial affairs.
  www4.gov.ab.ca/just/trustee/other.cfm

  J.E. (Jack) Klinck, Q.C.
  Public Trustee for the Province of Alberta
  400 South, 10365 – 97 Street
  Edmonton AB T5J 3Z8
  Telephone: 780–422–3141
  Fax: 780–422–9136 e-mail: jack.klinck@gov.ab.ca

Appendix H:

Glossary of Special Education Terms

Adapted program	An adapted program retains the learning outcomes of the prescribed curriculum and adjustments to the instructional process are provided to address the special needs of the student.
Appeals	Timely, fair and open school-district level process that protects the rights of students and parents, and addresses differences of opinion about the education of students with special needs.
Assessment	The ongoing process of collecting information about a student using a number of formal and informal methods across a variety of domains relevant to performance (e.g., assessed skill development in academic and other areas, such as communication, adaptive functioning, behaviour, etc.) to develop and implement an appropriate program to support student learning.
Consultation	A process in which parents, school staff and appropriate others share information relevant to the student's educational program. Parents and, where appropriate, students are involved in decision making.
Inclusion	Inclusion, by definition, refers not merely to setting but to specially designed instruction and support for students with special needs in regular classrooms and neighbourhood schools. (Also known as integration or mainstreaming.)

Appendix H: Glossary of Special Education Terms—continued

Individualized Program Plan (IPP)	An Individualized Program Plan (IPP) is a concise plan of action designed to address the student's special needs, and is based on diagnostic information, which provides the basis for intervention strategies. All students with special needs, from severely disabled to the gifted and talented, require an IPP.
Informed consent	Informed consent means that the individual: • has been provided with all information relevant to the activity for which consent is sought • understands and agrees, in writing, to the carrying out of the activity for which his or her consent is sought • understands that the granting of consent is voluntary and may be withdrawn at anytime.
Modified program	A modified program has learning outcomes which are significantly different from the provincial curriculum and are specifically selected to meet the student's special needs.
Placement	The setting in which the special education program or service is delivered to the student.
Review by the Minister	The Minister of Learning may review a board decision on some specific matters, including the special education placement for a student with special needs.
School-based team	The team may consist of the school administrator, a classroom teacher, a special education teacher, a student's parent(s) and, where appropriate, the student.

Appendix H: Glossary of Special Education Terms—continued

Specialized assessment	Specialized assessments, including psycho-educational assessments, measure areas of functioning and/or development beyond the academic. A specialized assessment is an individualized or standardized measurement across a variety of domains relevant to a student's social and educational performance (e.g., intellectual, personality/emotional, behavioural) for the purpose of providing an appropriate program.
Teacher assistant	A person who works under the direction of a certificated staff member and who assists in the implementation of the student's individualized program plan (IPP).
Transition	The consultative process that involves the student, parents, other professionals, receiving school and staff, and community agencies, as appropriate, to enable students to prepare for and successfully make changes (school entry, between grades/levels of schooling/schools and upon school completion).

Appendix I:

Alberta Learning Special Education Resources

Programming for Students with Special Needs Series

This series was developed for regular classroom and special education teachers to assist them with programming for students with special needs. The information in each book is interrelated and can be used to enhance the teaching and learning of all students.

- Book 1 *Teaching for Student Differences* (1995)
  Order #292855 / $8.65 * / 151 pgs.
  Highlights strategies for differentiating instruction within the regular classroom for students who may have learning or behavioural difficulties, or who may be gifted and talented. It also describes a process for adapting the regular program.

- Book 2 *Essential and Supportive Skills for Students with Developmental Disabilities* (1995)
  Order #292863 / $10.10 * / 262 pgs.
  Includes developmental checklists for communication skills, gross and fine motor skills, as well as charts and checklists which provide a continuum of life skills.

- Book 3 *Individualized Program Plans (IPPs)* (1995)
  Order #292871 / $5.95 * / 102 pgs.
  Describes a process for developing individualized program plans (IPPs) to meet the learning needs of students with special needs. It includes strategies for involving parents, forms and checklists for planning, ideas for transition planning, and case studies and samples of completed IPPs.

Appendix I: Alberta Learning Special Education Resources—continued

- Book 4 *Teaching Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing* (1995)
  Order #292889 / $6.50 * / 86 pgs.
  Includes information on the nature of hearing loss, various communication systems, program planning and teaching strategies. It also includes a section on amplification and educational technologies, and hints for troubleshooting hearing aids and FM systems.

- Book 5 *Teaching Students with Visual Impairments* (1996)
  Order #292904 / $4.05 * / 98 pgs.
  Addresses the nature of visual impairment, educational implications, specific needs, instructional strategies, the importance of orientation and mobility instruction, and the use of technology.

- **Books 1–5** can be ordered as a set in one binder.
  Order #292847 / $43.35 *

- Book 6 *Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities* (1996)
  Order #315699 / $21.45 * / 355 pgs.
  Provides practical strategies for regular classroom and special education teachers. It includes information on identification and program planning, assessment, learning styles, long-range planning and instructional strategies.

- Book 7 *Teaching Students who are Gifted and Talented* (2000)
  Order #415283 / $16.50 * / 356 pgs.
  Addresses administration of programs for the gifted and talented at both the district and school levels, and discusses various conceptions of giftedness. It also discusses identification of students, developing individualized program plans and working with parents.

Appendix I: Alberta Learning Special Education Resources—continued

- Book 8 *Teaching Students with Emotional Disorders and/or Mental Illnesses* (2000)
  Order # 411653 / $14.50 * / 207 pgs.
  Takes a comprehensive look at six emotional disorders and mental illnesses including: eating disorders, anxiety disorders, depression, schizophrenia, oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder. It describes the characteristics, symptoms and risk factors for each disorder or illness. It also includes strategies for teachers, parents and other caregivers to use to assist students.

- Book 9 *Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders* (2003)
  Available Spring 2003
  Provides basic knowledge about this spectrum of disabilities, educational programming implications and programming strategies.

- Book 10 *Teaching Students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD): Building Strengths, Creating Hope* (2003)
  Available Summer 2003
  Includes information on what FASD is, key considerations for planning effective education programs, and strategies for creating a positive classroom climate, organizing for instruction and responding to students' needs. The appendices contain reproducible blackline masters.

Other Teaching Resources

- *Unlocking Potential: Key Components of Programming for Students with Learning Disabilities* (2003)
  Order #510851 / $8.45 * / 124 pgs.
  Alberta Learning, in collaboration with the Calgary Learning Centre, identified nine key components of programming for students with learning disabilities. This resource includes sample strategies, suggested outcomes and connections to other Alberta Learning resources for each of the following nine components: collaboration, meaningful parent involvement, identification and assessment, ongoing assessment, individualized program plans, transition planning, self-advocacy, accommodations and instructions.

Appendix I: Alberta Learning Special Education Resources—continued

Resources for Parents

- *A Handbook for Aboriginal Parents of Children with Special Needs* (2000)
  Order #415704 / $4.60 * handbook / 88 pgs.
  Order #415712 / $5.75 * video
  This resource was developed by Alberta Learning in collaboration with the Siksika Board of Education. This handbook provides Aboriginal parents with information regarding the education of their child with special needs. It also includes tips to enhance communication between home and school. The accompanying video, *Our Treasured Children*, highlights intergenerational stories from members of the Aboriginal community.

- *The Parent Advantage: Helping Children Become More Successful Learners at Home and School, Grades 1–9* (1998)
  Order #361501 / $6.80 * / 68 pgs.
  This resource was developed jointly by Alberta Learning and the Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta. It was written by two experienced writer–teachers and includes strategies parents can use to help their child improve organizational, reading, writing, spelling, math, test taking and project skills.

- *The Journey: A Handbook for Parents of Children who are Gifted and Talented* (2003)
  Available Fall 2003
  Alberta Learning collaborated with the Alberta Associations for Bright Children in the development of a handbook for parents of gifted children. This handbook provides strategies for meeting the needs of gifted children in the home and community environments.

Appendix I: Alberta Learning Special Education Resources—continued

Resources for Students

- *Make School Work for You* (2001)
  Order #461426 / Student resource $5.85 * / 112 pgs.
  Order #461434 / Teacher Guide $4.75 * / 68 pgs.
  Order #470948 / Audio CDs $11.10 *
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